

A REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND ART

# Horizon

EDITED BY CYRIL CONNOLLY

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NOVELIST-PHILOSOPHERS—X: HEMINGWAY

BY ROBERT PENN WARREN

THIS TINY STAGE BY GILBERT ARMITAGE

STUDIES IN GENIUS—I: LEOPARDI BY FOSCARINA ALEXANDER

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# HORIZON

EDITED BY CYRIL CONNOLLY

Vol. XV No. 87 April 1947

## CONTENTS

		PAGE
COMMENT		151
THE FALL OF ROME	<i>W. H. Auden</i>	155
NOVELIST-PHILOSOPHERS—		
X: HEMINGWAY	<i>Robert Penn Warren</i>	156
THIS TINY STAGE	<i>Gilbert Armitage</i>	180
STUDIES IN GENIUS—		
I: LEOPARDI	<i>Foscarina Alexander</i>	195
WHERE SHALL JOHN GO?—		
XII: TENERIFFE	<i>Athelstan Rendall</i>	215
CORRESPONDENCE		225

The editorial and publishing Offices of HORIZON are at 2 Lansdowne Terrace, W.C.1.—Annual Subscription 32s. net, including postage; 6 months 16s.; U.S.A. and Canada: \$7.50 a year, single copies 65c. Agents for U.S.A.: Gotham Book Mart, 41 West 47th Street, New York City; Canada: The Jonathan David Co., 1501 St. Catherine Street West, Montreal, 25. Sweden: Importbokhandeln, Regeringsgatan 39, Stockholm.

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## COMMENT

IT was said two years ago in this column that 'every European war means a war lost by Europe' and recent events have brought home to us that in the last conflict we were defeated from an economic though not from a moral or military standpoint. 'We shall treat England like a beautiful flower,' Goering is supposed to have jested, 'but we shan't water the pot'—and something very like that is now happening. The advantages which position, coal, skill and enterprise won for us in the nineteenth century have been liquidated and we go back to scratch as a barren, humid, raw, but densely over-populated group of islands with an obsolete industrial plant, hideous but inadequate housing, a variety of unhealthy jungle possessions, vast international commitments, a falling birth-rate and a large class of infertile rentiers or over-specialized middlemen and brokers as our main capital. Surrounded on all sides by an iron curtain of good eating, we yet suffer from undernourishment, lack of vitamins and sunshine, lack of hope, energy, leisure and spirit. Thus the outstanding difference at this moment between English and Americans is that in America one is conscious that everyone is tuned up to a positive individual quality; a man is completely a man, or a woman a woman—vain, confident, affable and aggressive. Here, the ego is at half-pressure; most of us are not men or women but members of a vast seedy, over-worked, over-legislated, neuter class, with our drab clothes, our ration books and murder stories, our envious, stricken, old-world apathies and resentments—a careworn people. And the symbol of this mood is London, now the largest, saddest and dirtiest of great cities with its miles of unpainted half-inhabited houses, its chopless chop-houses, its beerless pubs, its once vivid quarters losing all personality, its squares bereft of elegance, its dandies in exile, its antiques in America, its shops full of junk, bunk, and tomorrow, its crowds moaning round the stained wicker of the cafeterias in their shabby raincoats, under a sky permanently dull and lowering like a metal dish-cover.

But soft! What forms are these? Why, the first quarter of a million tourists climbing on our trains, with their torn seats, pilfered bulbs and stinking lavatories, rushing through empty churches and derelict country houses, grappling with our moribund telephone system, languishing through our Sunday

afternoons by the porridge-grey ocean, freezing in our provincial hotels with their vest-pocket electric fires and slot machines, where an immutable phalanx of cross-word puzzle widows are clamped to the arm-chairs, waiting for death on a thousand a year.

'So young and so untender?

So young, my lord, and \*\*\*\*!'

'Oh dear, I can't think what that word can be; four letters.'

'Sounds like a quotation to me.'

'Sh—it's time for the News!'

In the general speculation about the British crisis there has been constant reference to decadence, but decadence in its exact sense—a decay of the vital principle—is not very evident; the symptoms are rather of breakdown and stoppage, of sudden illness rather than senility, and the improved prospects of the working class and petty bourgeoisie must be set against the impoverishment and restriction of enterprise among the upper and middle classes. The falling birth-rate, also, is an almost universal phenomenon. What we are really witnessing is the collapse of the Industrial Revolution, of that British Empire which was founded on geographical position, business daring, foreign investments, cheap labour, food and goods, wise administration, coal, iron and sea-power. We are decadent only if we fail to replace it by another, and we can replace it only by thinking clearly and directing the inventive genius of our country to that end.

The first question we must ask ourselves is whether, if we had the choice, we want to remain a great power or not. It is customary to admire Sweden, Holland, Switzerland, but do we really wish to become like them; should we reduce our population by two-thirds? I think the answer must be NO—that we cannot retreat into an enlightened provincialism as a small, smug community of industrialized sheep-breeders; that it is part, as it were, of our biological role as a nation to take on responsibilities, to expand our trade, to police and to administer, to take a leading part in an eventual world government, even if our country thereby becomes but a nursery and an almshouse. Therefore, having decided against becoming a minor power we must see how we can plan to avoid it. We must consider our actual resources, assuming India and the Dominions to be practically lost to us but that we retain for a while the tin and rubber of Malaya, Ceylon and various scattered possessions in the South Seas and West

Indies. There remains a very large proportion of the continent of Africa. With an intelligent arrangement with France and Belgium the development of all pastoral Africa from Rhodesia to the Mediterranean could be planned in relation to the industrial output of Western Europe. Having assured our markets and raw materials, the scientists could then be called in to solve the home crisis, which is largely due to the obsolescence of our industrial methods and machinery. London, for example, is an obsolete city. If we give complete wartime priorities to scientists most of our technical disabilities can be overcome and the mistakes of Victorian industrialization avoided. After the turn of the scientist would come that of the artist. Thus if we could only produce a great architect, a man or a group who could create a new three-dimensional poetry in a material suitable to our climate and our time, then the whole nightmare of war-destruction, housing schemes, ruin and dilapidation would vanish. There may have been people who bewailed the disappearance of Tudor timber, bear gardens and back alleys to make room for Wren's churches Lincoln's Inn or Queen Anne's Gate, but they do not win our sympathy. On the other hand the proposals for Regent's Park revealed the bankruptcy of contemporary architecture, for since we have no real idea as to what are the values of our present civilization we cannot get an architecture which embodies them.

After the search for an architecture the next priority will be a College of Taste, for it is clear that we cannot for long maintain our export trade without a rebirth of that quite vanished quality. The *Queen Elizabeth*, for instance, though a magnificent ship which will always be admired for its vast and silent engines, is at the decorator's level exactly on a par with the Cumberland Hotel. We are still lamentably slow to get our best artists to advise and help with our minor arts such as furniture, glass, china. The Americans snap up the modern Portuguese ware with its pineapple coffee pots and banana leaf dishes. When will Graham Sutherland design our breakfast sets? Or Henry Moore our garden sofas? 'Let us make all the good, fine and new things we can and so far from being afraid of other people getting our patterns, we should glory in it and throw out all the hints we can, and, if possible, have all the artists in Europe working after our models.' This is not, alas, the voice of twentieth-century England, but the bold mid-eighteenth-century accents of Josiah Wedgwood.

Over the last few months HORIZON has been quite rightly preoccupied with the decline in literary values, for it is a decline which must end in affecting the magazine itself. Thus for the first time there will be no article on last year's poetry for we do not consider the volumes produced in 1946 to justify one. It is disheartening to think that twenty years ago saw the first novels of Hemingway, Faulkner, Elizabeth Bowen, Rosamund Lehman, Evelyn Waugh, Henry Green, Graham Greene, to name but a few, for no new crop of novelists has arisen commensurate with them. Viewing the scene of 1947 moreover, one is conscious of the predominance of a certain set of names, the literary 'Best People', who somewhat resemble a galaxy of impotent prima donnas, while round them rotate tired business men, publishers, broadcasters and civil servants who once were poets, novelists, and revolutionary thinkers. The State and International Charity are now beginning to bestow patronage on the young and promising; I know of a young writer who has received three separate financial awards on the strength of one unpublished book—but when will the middle-aged author of proved merit receive his due? I could name half a dozen excellent writers in their early forties, who might one day make a valuable contribution to literature in return for a couple of years of complete idleness at a patron's expense and who are now wearily grinding themselves into hacks. Literature is becoming a spare time hobby (except for the novelist who sells his work to Hollywood) and is consequently losing its authority. As fewer people think clearly and feel strongly, so the power of the written word declines along with the ability to write, for though people may turn to great art in moments of national disaster there is no deterrent to aesthetic adventure like a prolonged struggle with domestic difficulties, food shortages, cold, ill-health and money worries. Art is not a necessity but an indispensable luxury; those who produce it must be cosseted. It would be a nice concession if all who could prove that they contributed to the culture of this country were allowed additional allowances for foreign travel—but when poets are excused Austerity and painters winter abroad we will be decadent with a vengeance, what?

\*       \*       \*

Owing to the fuel cuts there was no March HORIZON. There will instead be a 150-page double number on the Arts in America.

*W. H. AUDEN*

## THE FALL OF ROME

TO C. C.

THE piers are pummelled by the waves;  
In a lonely field the rain  
Lashes an abandoned train;  
Outlaws fill the mountain caves.

Fantastic grow the evening gowns;  
Agents of the Fisc pursue  
Absconding tax-defaulters through  
The sewers of provincial towns.

Private rites of magic send  
The temple prostitutes to sleep;  
All the literati keep  
An imaginary friend.

Cerebrotonic Cato may  
Extol the Ancient Disciplines,  
But the muscle-bound Marines  
Mutiny for food and pay.

Caesar's double-bed is warm  
As an unimportant clerk  
Writes I DO NOT LIKE MY WORK  
On a pink official form.

Unendowed with wealth or pity,  
Little birds with scarlet legs,  
Sitting on their speckled eggs,  
Eye each flu-infected city.

Altogether elsewhere, vast  
Herds of reindeer move across  
Miles and miles of golden moss,  
Silently and very fast.

# NOVELIST-PHILOSOPHERS-X

## HEMINGWAY<sup>1</sup>

ROBERT PENN WARREN

### I

THE situations and characters of Hemingway's world are usually violent. There is the hard-drinking and sexually promiscuous world of *The Sun Also Rises*; the chaotic and brutal world of war as in *A Farewell to Arms*, *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, many of the inserted sketches of *In Our Time*, the play *The Fifth Column*, and some of the stories; the world of sport, as in 'Fifty Grand', 'My Old Man', 'The Undefeated', 'The Snows of Kilimanjaro'; the world of crime as in 'The Killers', 'The Gambler, the Nun, and the Radio', and *To Have and To Have Not*. Even when the situation of a story does not fall into one of these categories, it usually involves a desperate risk, and behind it is the shadow of ruin, physical or spiritual. As for the typical characters, they are usually tough men, experienced in the hard worlds they inhabit, and not obviously given to emotional display or sensitive shrinking, men like Rinaldi or Frederick Henry of *A Farewell to Arms*, Robert Jordan of *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, Harry Morgan of *To Have and To Have Not*, the big-game hunter of 'The Snows of Kilimanjaro', the old bull-fighter of 'The Undefeated', or the pugilist of 'Fifty Grand'. Or if the typical character is not of this seasoned order, he is a very young man, or boy, first entering the violent world and learning his first adjustment to it.

We have said that the shadow of ruin is behind the typical Hemingway situation. The typical character faces defeat or death. But out of defeat or death the character usually manages to salvage something. And here we discover Hemingway's special interest in such situations and such characters. His heroes are not defeated except upon their own terms. They are not squealers, welshers, compromisers, or cowards, and when they confront defeat they realize that the stance they take, the stoic endurance,

<sup>1</sup> Reprinted by kind permission of *The Kenyon Review*.

the stiff upper lip mean a kind of victory. Defeated upon their own terms, some of them have even courted their defeat; and certainly they have maintained, even in the practical defeat, an ideal of themselves, some definition of how a man should behave, formulated or unformulated, by which they have lived. They represent some notion of a code, some notion of honour, which makes a man a man, and which distinguishes him from people who merely follow their random impulses and who are, by consequence, 'messy'.

In case after case, we can illustrate this 'principle of sportsmanship', as one critic has called it, at the centre of a story or novel. For instance, Brett, the heroine of *The Sun Also Rises*, gives up Romero, the young bull-fighter with whom she is in love, because she knows she will ruin him, and her tight-lipped remark to Jake, the newspaper man who is the narrator of the novel, might almost serve as the motto of Hemingway's work: 'You know it makes one feel rather good deciding not to be a bitch'.

It is the discipline of the code which makes man human, a sense of style or good form. This applies not only in isolated, dramatic cases such as those listed above, but in a more pervasive way which can give meaning, partially at least, to the confusions of living. The discipline of the soldier, the form of the athlete, the gameness of the sportsman, the technique of an artist can give some sense of the human order, and can achieve a moral significance. And here we see how Hemingway's concern with war and sport crosses his concern with literary style. If a writer can get the kind of style at which Hemingway professed, in *Green Hills of Africa*, to aim, then 'nothing else matters. It is more important than anything else he can do.' It is more important because, ultimately, it is a moral achievement. And no doubt for this reason, as well as for the reason of Henry James's concern with cruxes of a moral code, he is, as he says in *Green Hills of Africa*, an admirer of the work of James, the devoted stylist.

But to return to the subject of Hemingway's world: the code and the discipline are important because they can give meaning to life which otherwise seems to have no meaning or justification. In other words, in a world without supernatural sanctions, in the God-abandoned world of modernity, man can realize an ideal

meaning only in so far as he can define and maintain the code. The effort to define and maintain the code, however limited and imperfect it may be, is the characteristically human effort and provides the tragic or pitiful human story. Hemingway's attitude on this point is much like that of Robert Louis Stevenson, as Stevenson states it in one of his essays, 'Pulvis et Umbra': '—everywhere some virtue cherished or affected, everywhere some decency of thought or carriage, everywhere the ensign of man's ineffectual goodness . . . under every circumstance of failure, without hope, without help, without thanks, still obscurely fighting the lost fight of virtue, still clinging, in the brothel or on the scaffold, to some rag of honour, the poor jewel of their souls! They may seek to escape, and yet they cannot; it is not alone their privilege and glory, but their doom; they are condemned to some nobility . . .'

Hemingway's code is more rigorous than Stevenson's and perhaps he finds fewer devoted to it, but like Stevenson he can find his characteristic hero and characteristic story among the discards of society, and like Stevenson is aware of the touching irony of that fact. But for the moment the important thing in the parallel is that, for Stevenson, the world in which this drama of pitiful aspiration and stoic endurance is played out is, objectively considered, a violent and meaningless world—'our rotary island loaded with predatory life and more drenched with blood than ever mutinied ship . . . scuds through space'. Neither Hemingway nor Stevenson invented this world. It had already appeared in literature before their time, and that is a way of saying that this cheerless vision had already begun to trouble men. It is the world we find pictured (and denied) in Tennyson's *In Memoriam*—the world in which human conduct is a product of 'dying Nature's earth and lime'. It is the world pictured (and not denied) in Hardy and Housman, a world which seems to be presided over by blind Doomsters (if by anybody), as Hardy put it in his poem 'Hap', or made by some brute and blackguard (if by anybody), as Housman put it in his poem 'The Chestnut Casts Its Flambeaux'. It is the world of Zola or Dreiser or Conrad or Faulkner. It is, to use Bertrand Russell's phrase, the world of 'secular hurryings through space'. It is the God-abandoned world,

the world of Nature-as-all. We know where the literary men got this picture. They got it from the scientists of the nineteenth century. This is Hemingway's world, too, the world with nothing at centre.

Over against this naturalistic view of the world, there was, of course, an argument for Divine Intelligence and a Divine purpose, an argument which based itself on the beautiful system of nature, on natural law. The closely knit order of the natural world, so the argument ran, implies a Divine Intelligence. But if one calls Hemingway's attention to the fact that the natural world is a world of order, his reply is on record in a story called '*A Natural History of the Dead*'. There he quotes from the traveller Mungo Park, who, naked and starving in an African desert, observed a beautiful little moss-flower and meditated thus: 'Can the Being who planted, watered, and brought to perfection, in this obscure part of the world, a thing which appears of so small importance, look with unconcern upon the situation and suffering of creatures formed after his own image? Surely not. Reflections like these would not allow me to despair: I started up and, disregarding both hunger and fatigue, travelled forward, assured that relief was at hand; and I was not disappointed.'

And Hemingway continues: 'With a disposition to wonder and adore in like manner, as Bishop Stanley says [the author of *A Familiar History of Birds*], can any branch of Natural History be studied without increasing that faith, love and hope which we also, everyone of us, need in our journey through the wilderness of life? Let us therefore see what inspiration we may derive from the dead.' Then Hemingway presents the picture of a modern battlefield, where the bloated and decaying bodies give a perfect example of the natural order of chemistry—but scarcely an argument for faith, hope, and love. That picture is his answer to the argument that the order of nature implies meaning in the world.

In one of the stories, '*A Clean, Well-Lighted Place*', we find the best description of this world which underlies Hemingway's world of violent action. Early in the story we see an old man sitting late in a Spanish café. Two waiters are speaking of him.

'Last week he tried to commit suicide,' one waiter said.

'Why?'

'He was in despair.'

'What about?'

'Nothing.'

'How do you know it was nothing?'

'He has plenty of money.'

The despair beyond plenty of money—or beyond all the other gifts of the world: its nature becomes a little clearer at the end of the story when the older of the two waiters is left alone, reluctant, too, to leave the clean, well-lighted place. 'Turning off the electric light he continued the conversation with himself. It is the light of course, but it is necessary that the place be clean and pleasant. You do not want music. Certainly you do not want music. Nor can you stand before a bar with dignity although that is all that is provided for these hours. What did he fear? It was not fear or dread. It was a nothing that he knew too well. It was all a nothing and a man was nothing too. It was only that and light was all it needed and a certain cleanliness and order. Some lived in it and never felt it but he knew it all was *nada y pues nada y nada y pues nada*.<sup>1</sup> Our *nada* who art in *nada*, *nada* be thy name thy kingdom *nada* thy will be *nada* in *nada* as it is in *nada*. Give us this *nada* our daily *nada* and *nada* us our *nadas* as we *nada* our *nadas* and *nada* us not into *nada* but deliver us from *nada*; *pues nada*. Hail nothing full of nothing, nothing is with thee. He smiled and stood before a bar with a shining steam pressure coffee machine.

"What's yours?" asked the barman.

"*Nada*."

At the end the old waiter is ready to go home: 'Now, without thinking further, he would go home to his room. He would lie in bed and finally, with daylight, he would go to sleep. After all, he said to himself, it's probably only insomnia. Many must have it.'

And the sleepless man—the man obsessed by death, by the meaninglessness of the world, by nothingness, by *nada*—is one of the recurring symbols in the works of Hemingway. In this phase Hemingway is a religious writer. The despair beyond plenty of money, the despair which makes a sleeplessness beyond insomnia, is the despair felt by a man who hungers for the certainties and

<sup>1</sup> *Nada y pues nada*, etc.: nothing and after that nothing, etc.

meaningfulness of a religious faith but who cannot find in his world a ground for that faith.

Another recurring symbol, we have said, is the violent man. But the sleepless man and the violent man are not contradictory but complementary symbols. They represent phases of the same question, the same hungering for meaning in the world. The sleepless man is the man brooding upon nada, upon chaos, upon Nature-as-all. (For Nature-as-all equals moral chaos; even its bulls and lions and kudu are not admired by Hemingway as creatures of conscious self-discipline; their courage is meaningful only in so far as it symbolizes human courage.) The violent man is the man taking an action appropriate to the realization of the fact of nada. He is, in other words, engaged in the effort to discover human values in a naturalistic world.

Before we proceed with this line of discussion, it might be asked, 'Why does Hemingway feel that the quest necessarily involves violence?' Now, at one level, the answer to this question would involve the whole matter of the bias towards violence in modern literature. But let us take it in its more immediate reference. The typical Hemingway hero is the man aware, or in the process of becoming aware, of nada. Death is the great nada. Therefore whatever solution the hero gets must, to be good, stick even against the fact of death. It has to be good in the bull-ring or on the battlefield and not merely in the study or lecture room. In fact, Hemingway is anti-intellectual, and has a great contempt for any type of solution arrived at without the testing of immediate experience. One of his more uningratiating passages—again from '*A Natural History of the Dead*'—makes the point amply clear: 'The only natural death I've ever seen, outside of the loss of blood, which isn't bad, was death from Spanish influenza. In this you drown in mucus, choking, and how you know the patient's dead is: at the end he turns to be a little child again, though with his manly force, and fills the sheets as full as any diaper with one vast, final yellow cataract that flows and dribbles on after he is gone. So now I want to see the death of any self-styled Humanist because a persevering traveller like Mungo Park or me lives on and maybe yet will see the actual death of members of this literary sect and watch the noble exits they make. In my musings as a naturalist it has occurred to me that while decorum is an excellent thing, some must be indecorous if the race is to be carried on since

the position described for procreation is indecorous, highly indecorous, and it occurred to me that perhaps that is what these people are, or were: the children of decorous cohabitation. But regardless of how they started I hope to see the finish of a few, and speculate how worms will try that long-preserved sterility; with their quaint pamphlets gone to bust and into foot-notes all their lust.'

So aside from the question of a dramatic sense which would favour violence, and aside from the mere matter of personal temperament (for Hemingway describes himself on more than one occasion as obsessed by death), the presentation of violence is appropriate in his work because death is the great *nada*. In taking violent risks man confronts in dramatic terms the issue of *nada* which is implicit in all of Hemingway's world.

But to return to our general line of discussion. There are two aspects to this violence which is involved in the quest of the Hemingway hero, two aspects which seem to represent an ambivalent attitude toward nature.

First, there is the conscious sinking into nature, shall we call it. On this line of reasoning we would find something like this: if there is at centre only *nada*, then the only sure compensation in life, the only reality, is gratification of appetite, the relish of sensation. Continually in the stories and novels one finds such sentences as this from *Green Hills of Africa*: '... drinking this, the first one of the day, the finest one there is, and looking at the thick bush we passed in the dark, feeling the cool wind of the night and smelling the good smell of Africa, I was altogether happy'. What is constantly interesting in such sentences is the fact that happiness, a notion which we traditionally connect with a complicated state of being, with notions of virtue, of achievement, etc., is here equated with a set of merely agreeable sensations. The careful relish of sensation—that is what counts, always.

This intense awareness of the world of the senses is, of course, one of the things which made the early work of Hemingway seem, upon its first impact, so fresh and pure. Physical nature is nowhere rendered with greater vividness than in his work, and probably his only competitors in this department of literature are William Faulkner, among the modern, and Henry David Thoreau, among the older American writers. The meadows, forests, lakes, and trout streams of America, and the arid, sculpturesque mountains

of Spain, appear with astonishing immediacy, an immediacy not dependent upon descriptive flourishes. But not only the appearance of landscape is important; a great deal of the freshness comes from the discrimination of sensation, the coldness of water in the 'squelchy' shoes after wading, the tangy smell of dry sage brush, the 'cleanly' smell of grease and oil on a field piece. Hemingway's appreciation and rendering of the aesthetic quality of the physical world is important, but a peculiar poignancy is implicit in the rendering of those qualities; the beauty of the physical world is a background for the human predicament, and the very relishing of the beauty is merely a kind of desperate and momentary compensation possible in the midst of the predicament.

This careful relishing of the world of the senses comes to a climax in drinking and sex. Drink is the 'giant-killer', the weapon against man's thought of nada. And so is sex, for that matter, though when sexual attraction achieves the status of love, the process is one which attempts to achieve a meaning rather than to forget meaninglessness in the world. In terms of drinking and sex, the typical Hemingway hero is a man of monel-metal stomach and Homeric prowess in the arts of love. And the typical situation is love, with some drinking, against the background of nada—of civilization gone to pot, or war, or death—as we get it in all of the novels in one form or another, and in many of the stories.

It is important to remember, however, that the sinking into nature, even at the level of drinking and mere sexuality, is a self-conscious act. It is not the random gratification of appetite. We see this quite clearly in *The Sun Also Rises* in the contrast between Cohn, who is merely a random dabbler in the world of sensation, who is merely trying to amuse himself, and the initiates like Jake and Brett, who are aware of the nada at the centre of things and whose dissipations, therefore, have a philosophical significance. The initiate in Hemingway's world raises the gratification of appetite to the level of a cult and a discipline.

The cult of sensation, as we have already indicated, passes over very readily into the cult of true love, for the typical love story is presented primarily in terms of the cult of sensation. (*A Farewell to Arms*, as we shall see when we come to a detailed study of that novel, is closely concerned with that transition.) Even in the cult of true love it is the moment which counts, and the individual. There is never any past or future to the love stories and the lovers

are always isolated, not moving in an ordinary human society within its framework of obligations. The notion of the cult—a secret cult composed of those who have been initiated into the secret of nada—is constantly played up. In *A Farewell to Arms*, for instance, Catherine and Frederick are, quite consciously, two against the world, a world which is, literally as well as figuratively, an alien world. The peculiar relationship between Frederick and the priest takes on a new significance if viewed in terms of the secret cult. We shall come to this topic later, but for the moment we can say that the priest is a priest of Divine Love, the subject about which he and Frederick converse in the hospital, and that Frederick himself is a kind of priest, one of the initiate in the end, of the cult of profane love. This same pattern of two against the world, with an understanding confidante or interpreter, reappears in *For Whom the Bell Tolls*—with Pilar, the gipsy woman who understands 'love', substituting for the priest of *A Farewell to Arms*.

The initiates of the cult of love are those who are aware of nada, but their effort, as members of the cult, is to find a meaning to put in place of the nada. That is, there is an attempt to make the relationship of love take on a religious significance in so far as it can give meaning to life. This general topic is not new with the work of Hemingway. It is one of the literary themes of the nineteenth century—and has, as a matter of fact, a much longer history than that. But we find it fully stated in the last century in many instances. To take one, there is 'Dover Beach' by Matthew Arnold. In a world from which religious faith has been removed the lovers can only turn to each other to find significance in life:

Ah, love, let us be true  
 To one another ! for the world, which seems  
 To lie before us like a land of dreams,  
 So various, so beautiful, so new,  
 Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,  
 Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain ;  
 And we are here as on a darkling plain  
 Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,  
 Where ignorant armies clash by night.

If the cult of love arises from and states itself in the language of the cult of sensation, it is an extension of the sinking-into-nature aspect of the typical Hemingway violence; but in so far as it

involves a discipline and a search for a 'faith', it leads us to the second aspect of the typical violence.

The violence, although in its first aspect it represents a sinking into nature, at the same time, in its second aspect, represents a conquest of nature, and of *nada* in man. It represents such a conquest, not because of the fact of violence, but because the violence appears in terms of discipline, a style, and a code. It is, as we have already seen, in terms of a self-imposed discipline that the heroes make one gallant, though limited, effort to redeem the incoherence of the world: they attempt to impose some form upon the disorder of their lives, the technique of the bull-fighter or sportsman, the discipline of the soldier, the fidelity of the lover, or even the code of the gangster, which, though brutal and apparently dehumanizing, has its own ethic.

The discipline, the form, is never quite capable of subduing the world, but fidelity to it is part of the gallantry of defeat. By fidelity to it the hero manages to keep one small place 'clean' and 'well-lighted', and manages to retain, or achieve for one last moment, his dignity. As the old Spanish waiter muses, there should be a 'clean, well-lighted place' where one could keep one's dignity at the late hour.

We have said earlier that the typical Hemingway character is tough and, apparently, insensitive. But only apparently, for the fidelity to a code, to the discipline, may be the index to a sensitivity which allows the characters to see, at moments, their true plight. At times, and usually at times of stress, it is the tough man in the Hemingway world, the disciplined man, who is actually aware of pathos or tragedy. The individual toughness (which may be taken to be the private discipline demanded by the world) may find itself in conflict with the natural human reaction; but the Hemingway hero, though he may be aware of the claims of the natural reaction, the spontaneous human emotion, cannot surrender to it because he knows that the only way to hold on to the definition of himself, to 'honour' or 'dignity', is to maintain the discipline, the code. For example, when pity appears in the Hemingway world—as in '*The Pursuit Race*'—it does not appear in its maximum but in its minimum manifestation.

What this means in terms of style and method is the use of understatement. This understatement, stemming from the contrast between the sensitivity and the superimposed discipline, is a

constant aspect of the work, an aspect which was caught in a cartoon in the *New Yorker*. The cartoon showed a brawny, muscle-knotted forearm and a hairy hand which clutched a rose. It was entitled 'The Soul of Ernest Hemingway'. Just as there is a margin of victory in the defeat of the Hemingway characters, so there is a little margin of sensitivity in their brutal and apparently insensitive world. Hence we have the ironical circumstance—a central circumstance in creating the pervasive irony of Hemingway's work—that the revelation of the values characteristic of his work arises from the most unpromising people and the most unpromising situations—the little streak of poetry or pathos in 'The Pursuit Race', 'The Killers', 'My Old Man', 'A Clean, Well-Lighted Place', or 'The Undefeated'. We have a perfect example of it in the last-named story. After the defeat of the old bull-fighter, who is lying wounded on an operating table, Zurito, the picador, is about to cut off his pigtail, the mark of his profession. But when the wounded man starts up, despite his pain, and says, 'You couldn't do a thing like that', Zurito says, 'I was joking'. Zurito becomes aware that, after all, the old bull-fighter is, in a way, undefeated, and deserves to die with his coleta on.

This locating of the poetic, the pathetic, or the tragic in the unpromising person or situation is not unique with Hemingway. It is something with which we are acquainted in a great deal of our literature since the Romantic Movement. The sensibility is played down, and an anti-romantic surface sheathes the work; the point is in the contrast. The impulse which led Hemingway to the simple character is akin to that which drew Wordsworth to the same choice. Wordsworth felt that his unsophisticated peasants were more honest in their responses than the cultivated man, and were therefore more poetic. Instead of Wordsworth's peasant we have in Hemingway's work the bull-fighter, the soldier, the revolutionary, the sportsman, and the gangster; instead of Wordsworth's children we have the young men like Nick, the person just on the verge of being initiated into the world. There are, of course, differences between the approach of Wordsworth and that of Hemingway, but there is little difference on the point of marginal sensibility. In one sense, both are anti-intellectual, and in such poems as 'Resolution and Independence' or 'Michael' one finds even closer ties.

I have just indicated a similarity between Wordsworth and Hemingway on the grounds of a romantic anti-intellectualism. But with Hemingway it is far more profound and radical than with Wordsworth. All we have to do to see the difference is to put Wordsworth's Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads* over against any number of passages from Hemingway. The intellectualism of the eighteenth century had merely put a veil of stereotyped language over all the world and a veil of snobbism over a large area of human experience. That is Wordsworth's indictment. But Hemingway's indictment of the intellectualism of the past is that it wound up in the mire and blood of 1914 to 1918; that it was a pack of lies leading to death. We can put over against the Preface of Wordsworth, a passage from *A Farewell to Arms*: 'I was always embarrassed by the words sacred, glorious, and sacrifice, and the expression in vain. We had heard them, sometimes standing in the rain almost out of earshot, so that only the shouted words came through, and had read them, on proclamations that were slapped up by billposters over other proclamations, now for a long time, and I had seen nothing sacred, and the things that were glorious had no glory and the sacrifices were like the stock-yards at Chicago if nothing was done with the meat except to bury it. There were many words that you could not stand to hear and finally only the names of places had dignity. . . . Abstract words such as glory, honour, courage, or hallow were obscene beside the concrete names of villages, the numbers of roads, the names of rivers, the numbers of regiments and the dates.' I do not mean to say that the general revolution in style, and the revolt against the particular intellectualism of the nineteenth century was a result of the World War 1914-18. As a matter of fact, that revolt was going on long before the war, but for Hemingway, and for many others, the war gave the situation a peculiar depth and urgency.

Perhaps we might scale the matter thus: Wordsworth was a revolutionist—he truly had a new view of the world—but his revolutionary view left great tracts of the world untouched; the Church of England, for instance. Arnold and Tennyson, a generation or so later, though not revolutionists themselves, were much more profoundly stirred by the revolutionary situation than ever Wordsworth was; that is, the area of the world involved in the debate was for them greater. Institutions are called into

question in a more fundamental way. But they managed to hang on to their English God and their English institutions. With Hardy, the area of disturbance has grown greater, and what can be salvaged is much less. He, like the earlier Victorians, had a strong sense of community to sustain him in the face of the universe which was for him, as not finally for Arnold and Tennyson, unfriendly, or at least neutral and Godless. But his community underlay institutions, a human communion which as a matter of fact was constantly being violated by institutions; and this violation is, in fact, a constant source of subject matter and a constant spring of irony. Nevertheless Hardy could refer to himself as a meliorist.

But with Hemingway, though there is a secret community, it has greatly shrunk, and its definition has become much more specialized. Its members are those who know the code. They recognize each other, they know the password and the secret grip, but they are few in number, and each is set off against the world like a wounded lion ringed round by waiting hyenas. (*Green Hills of Africa* gives us the hyena symbol—the animal whose death is comic because it is all hideously ‘appetite’, wounded, it eats its own intestines.) Furthermore, this secret community is not constructive; Hemingway is no meliorist. In fact, there are hints that somewhere at the back of his mind, and in behind his work, there is a kind of Spenglerian view of history: our civilization is running down. We get this most explicitly in *Green Hills of Africa*: ‘A continent ages quickly once we come. The natives live in harmony with it. But the foreigner destroys, cuts down the trees, drains the water, so that the water supply is altered and in a short time the soil, once the sod is turned under, is cropped out and, next, it starts to blow away as it has blown away in every old country and as I had seen it start to blow in Canada. The earth gets tired of being exploited. A country wears out quickly unless man puts back in it all his residue and that of all his beasts. When he quits using beasts and uses machines, the earth defeats him quickly. The machine can’t reproduce, nor does it fertilize the soil, and it eats what he cannot raise. A country was made to be as we found it. We are the intruders and after we are dead we may have ruined it, but it will still be there and we don’t know what the next changes are. I suppose they all end up like Mongolia.’

‘I would come back to Africa but not to make a living from

it. . . . But I would come back to where it pleased me to live; to really live. Not just let my life pass. Our people went to America because that was the place for them to go then. It had been a good country and we had made a bloody mess of it and I would go, now, somewhere else as we had always had the right to go somewhere else and as we had always gone. You could always come back. Let the others come to America who did not know that they had come too late. Our people had seen it at its best and fought for it when it was well worth fighting for. Now I would go somewhere else.'

This is the most explicit statement, but the view is implicit in case after case. The general human community, the general human project, has gone to pot. There is only the little secret community of, paradoxically enough, individualists who have resigned from the general community, and who are strong enough to live without any illusions, lies, and big words of the herd. At least, this is the case up to the novel *To Have and To Have Not*. In that novel and in *For Whom the Bell Tolls* Hemingway attempts to return, as it were, his individualistic hero to society, to give him a common stake with the fate of other men.

But to come back to the matter of Wordsworth and Hemingway. What in Wordsworth is merely simple or innocent is in Hemingway violent: the gangster or bull-fighter replaces the leech-gatherer or the child. Hemingway's world is a more disordered world, and the sensibility of his characters is more ironically in contrast with their world. The most immediate consideration here is the playing down of the sensibility as such, the sheathing of it in the code of toughness. Gertrude Stein's tribute is here relevant: 'Hemingway is the shyest and proudest and sweetest-smelling story-teller of my reading'. But this shyness manifests itself in the irony. In this, of course, Hemingway's irony corresponds to the Byronic irony. But the relation to Byron is even more fundamental. The pity is only valid when it is wrung from the man who has been seasoned by experience. Therefore a premium is placed on the fact of violent experience. The 'dumb ox' character, commented on by Wyndham Lewis, represents the Wordsworthian peasant; the character with the code of the tough guy, the initiate, the man cultivating honour, gallantry, and recklessness, represents the Byronic aristocrat.

The failures of Hemingway, like his successes, are also rooted

in this situation. The successes occur in those instances where Hemingway accepts the essential limitations of his premises, that is, when there is an equilibrium between the dramatization and the characteristic Hemingway 'point', when the system of ironies and understatements is coherent. On the other hand, the failures occur when we feel that Hemingway has not respected the limitations of his premises; that is, when the dramatization seems to be 'rigged' and the violence, therefore, merely theatrical. The characteristic irony, or understatement, in such cases, seems to be too self-conscious. For example, let us glance at Hemingway's most spectacular failure, *To Have and To Have Not*. The point of the novel is based on the contrast between the smuggler and the rich owners of the yachts along the quay. But the irony is essentially an irony without centre or reference. It is superficial, for, as a critic in the *Partisan Review* indicated, the only difference between the smuggler and the rich is that the rich were successful in their buccaneering. The revelation which comes to the smuggler dying in his launch—'a man alone ain't got no . . . chance'—is a meaningless revelation, for it has no reference to the actual dramatization. It is, finally, a failure in intellectual analysis of the situation. In the same way, the much-advertised 'The Snows of Kilimanjaro' is a failure.

Much has been said to the effect that *To Have and To Have Not* and *For Whom the Bell Tolls* represent a basic change of point of view, an enlargement of what I have called the secret community. No doubt that is the intention behind both books, but the temper of both books is the old temper, the cast of characters is the old cast, and the assumptions lying far below the explicit intention are the old assumptions.

The monotony and self-imitation into which Hemingway's work sometimes falls is again an effect of a failure in dramatization. Hemingway, apparently, can dramatize his 'point' in only one basic situation and with only one set of characters. As we have seen, he has only two key characters, with certain variations from them in terms of contrast or counterpoint. His best women characters, by the way, are those which most nearly approximate the men; that is, they embody the masculine virtues and point of view characteristic of Hemingway's work.

But the monotony is not merely a monotony deriving from the characters as types; it derives rather from the limitations of

the author's sensibility, which can find interest only in one issue. A more flexible sensibility, one capable of making nicer discriminations, might discover great variety in such key characters and situations. But Hemingway's successes are due, in part at least, to the close co-ordination which he sometimes achieves between the character and situation on the one hand, and the sensibility as it reflects itself in the style, on the other hand.

The style characteristically is simple, even to the point of monotony. The characteristic sentence is simple, or compound; and if compound, there is no implied subtlety in the co-ordination of the clauses. The paragraph structure is, characteristically, based on simple sequence. There is an obvious relation between this style and the characters and situations with which the author is concerned—a question of dramatic decorum. (There are, on the other hand, examples, especially in the novels, of other more fluent, lyrical effects, but even here this fluency is founded on the conjunction *and*; it is a rhythmical and not a logical fluency. And the lyrical quality is simply a manifestation of that marginal sensibility, as can be demonstrated by an analysis of the occasions on which it appears.) But there is a more fundamental aspect of the question, an aspect which involves not the sensibility of the characters but the sensibility of the author. The short simple rhythms, the succession of co-ordinate clauses, the general lack of subordination—all suggest a dislocated and ununified world. The figures which live in this world live a sort of hand-to-mouth existence perceptually, and conceptually, they hardly live at all.

## II

*A Farewell to Arms* is a love story. It is a compelling story at the merely personal level, but is much more compelling and significant when we see the figures of the lovers silhouetted against the flame-streaked blackness of war, of a collapsing world, of nada. For there is a story behind the love story. That story is the quest for meaning and certitude in a world which seems to offer nothing of the sort. It is, in a sense, a religious book; if it does not offer a religious solution it is nevertheless conditioned by the religious problem.

The very first scene of the book, though seemingly casual, is important if we are to understand the deeper motivations of the story. It is the scene at the officers' mess where the captain baits

the priest. 'Priest every night five against one,' the captain explains to Frederick. But Frederick, we see in this and later scenes, takes no part in the baiting. There is a bond between him and the priest, a bond which they both recognize. This becomes clear when, after the officers have advised Frederick where he should go on his leave to find the best girls, the priest turns to him and says that he would like for him to go to Abruzzi, his own province:

"There is good hunting. You would like the people and though it is cold it is clear and dry. You could stay with my family. My father is a famous hunter."

"Come on," said the captain. "We go whorehouse before it shuts."

"Goodnight," I said to the priest.

"Goodnight," he said.'

In the preliminary contrast between the officers, who invite the hero to go to the brothels, and the priest, who invites him to go to the cold, clear, dry country, we have in its simplest form the issue of the novel.

Frederick does go with the officers that night, and on his leave he does go to the cities, 'to the smoke of cafés and nights when the room whirled and you needed to look at the wall to make it stop, nights in bed, drunk, when you knew that that was all there was, and the strange excitement of waking and not knowing who it was with you, and the world all unreal in the dark and so exciting that you must resume again unknowing and not caring in the night, sure that this was all and all and all and not caring.' Frederick at the opening of the novel lives in the world of random and meaningless appetite, knowing that it is all and all and all, or thinking that he knows that. But behind that there is a dissatisfaction and disgust. Upon his return from his leave, sitting in the officers' mess, he tries to tell the priest how he is sorry that he had not gone to the clear, cold, dry country—the priest's home, which takes on the shadowy symbolic significance of another kind of life, another view of the world. The priest had always known that other country. 'He had always known what I did not know and what, when I learned it, I was always able to forget. But I did not know that then, although I learned it later.'

What Frederick learns later is the story behind the love story of the book.

But this theme is not merely stated at the opening of the novel and then absorbed into the action. It appears later, at crucial points, to define the line of meaning in the action. When, for example, Frederick is wounded, the priest visits him in the hospital. Their conversation makes even plainer the religious background of the novel. The priest has said that he would like to go back after the war to the Abruzzi. He continues:

“It does not matter. But there in my country it is understood that a man may love God. It is not a dirty joke.”

“I understand.”

‘He looked at me and smiled.

“You understand but you do not love God.”

“No.”

“You do not love Him at all?” he asked.

“I am afraid of Him in the night sometimes.”

“You should love Him.”

“I don’t love much.”

“Yes,” he said. “You do. What you tell me about in the nights. That is not love. That is only passion and lust. When you love you wish to do things for. You wish to sacrifice for. You wish to serve.”

“I don’t love.”

“You will. I know you will. Then you will be happy.”

We have here two items of importance. First, there is the definition of Frederick as the sleepless man, the man haunted by *nada*. Second, at this stage in the novel, the end of Book I, the true meaning of the love story with Catherine has not yet been defined. It is still at the level of appetite. The priest’s role is to indicate the next stage of the story, the discovery of the true nature of love, the ‘wish to do things for’. And he accomplishes this by indicating a parallel between secular love and Divine love, a parallel which implies Frederick’s quest for meaning and certitude. And to emphasize further this idea, Frederick, after the priest leaves, muses on the high, clean country of the Abruzzi, the priest’s home which has already been endowed with the symbolic significance of the religious view of the world.

In the middle of Book II (Chapter xviii), in which the love story begins to take on the significance which the priest had predicted, the point is indicated by a bit of dialogue between the lovers.

"Couldn't we be married privately some way? Then if anything happened to me or if you had a child—"

"There's no way to be married except by church or State. We are married privately. You see, darling, it would mean everything to me if I had any religion. But I haven't any religion."

"You gave me the Saint Anthony."

"That was for luck. Someone gave it to me."

"Then nothing worries you?"

"Only being sent away from you. You're my religion. You're all I've got."

Again, towards the end of Book IV (Chapter xxxv), just before Frederick and Catherine make their escape into Switzerland, Frederick is talking with a friend, the old Count Greffi, who has just said that he thought H. G. Wells's novel *Mr. Britling Sees It Through* a very good study of the English middle-class soul. But Frederick twists the word *soul* into another meaning.

"I don't know about the soul."

"Poor boy. We none of us know about the soul. Are you croyant?"

"At night."

Later in the same conversation the Count returns to the topic:

"And if you ever become devout pray for me if I am dead. I am asking several of my friends to do that. I had expected to become devout myself but it has not come." I thought he smiled sadly but I could not tell. He was so old and his face was very wrinkled, so that a smile used so many lines that all gradations were lost.

"I might become very devout," I said. "Anyway, I will pray for you."

"I had always expected to become devout. All my family died very devout. But somehow it does not come."

"It's too early."

"Maybe it is too late. Perhaps I have outlived my religious feeling."

"My own comes only at night."

"Then you too are in love. Do not forget that is a religious feeling."

So here, again, we find Frederick defined as the sleepless man, and the relation established between secular love and Divine love.

In the end, with the death of Catherine, Frederick discovers that the attempt to find a substitute for universal meaning in the

limited meaning of the personal relationship is doomed to failure. It is doomed because it is liable to all the accidents of a world in which human beings are like the ants running back and forth on a log burning in a campfire and in which death is, as Catherine says immediately before her own death, 'just a dirty trick'. But this is not to deny the value of the effort, or to deny the value of the discipline, the code, the stoic endurance, the things which make it true—or half true—that 'nothing ever happens to the brave'.

This question of the characteristic discipline takes us back to the beginning of the book, and to the context from which Frederick's effort arises. We have already mentioned the contrast between the officers of the mess and the priest. It is a contrast based on the man who is aware of the issue of meaning in life and those who are unaware of it, who give themselves over to the mere flow of accident, the contrast between the disciplined and the undisciplined. But the contrast is not merely between the priest and the officers. Frederick's friend, the surgeon Rinaldi, is another who is on the same 'side' of the contrast as the priest. He may go to the brothel with his brother officers, he may even bait the priest a little, but his personal relationship with Frederick indicates his affiliations; he is one of the initiate. Furthermore, he has the discipline of his profession, and as we have seen, in the Hemingway world, the discipline which seems to be merely technical, the style of the artist or the form of the athlete or bull-fighter, may be an index to a moral value. 'Already,' he says, 'I am only happy when I am working.' (Already because the seeking of pleasure in sensation is inadequate for Rinaldi.) This point appears more sharply in the remarks about the doctor who first attends to Frederick's wounded leg. He is incompetent and does not wish to take the responsibility for a decision. 'Before he came back three doctors came into the room. I have noticed that doctors who fail in the practice of medicine have a tendency to seek one another's company and aid in consultation. A doctor who cannot take out your appendix properly will recommend to you a doctor who will be unable to remove your tonsils with success. These were three such doctors.'

In contrast with them there is Dr. Valentini, who is competent, who is willing to take responsibility, and who, as a kind of mark of his role, speaks the same lingo, with the same bantering, ironical tone, as Rinaldi—the tone which is the mark of the initiate.

So we have the world of the novel divided into two groups, the initiate and the uninitiate, the aware and the unaware, the disciplined and the undisciplined. In the first group are Frederick, Catherine, Rinaldi, Valentini, Count Greffi, the old man who cut the paper silhouettes 'for pleasure', and Passini, Manera, and the other ambulance men in Frederick's command. In the second group are the officers of the mess, the incompetent doctors, the 'legitimate hero' Ettore, and the 'patriots'—all the people who do not know what is really at stake, who are decided by the big words, who do not have the discipline. They are the messy people, the people who surrender to the flow and illusion of things. It is this second group who provide the context of the novel, and more especially the context from which Frederick moves toward his final complete awareness.

The final awareness means, as we have said, that the individual is thrown back upon his private discipline and his private capacity to endure. The hero cuts himself off from the herd, the confused world, which symbolically appears as the routed army at Caporetto. And, as Malcolm Cowley has pointed out, the plunge into the flooded Tagliamento, when Frederick escapes from the battle police, has the significance of a rite. By this 'baptism' Frederick is reborn into another world; he comes out into the world of the man alone, no longer supported by and involved in society. 'Anger was washed away in the river along with my obligation. Although that ceased when the carabiniere put his hands on my collar. I would like to have had the uniform off although I did not care much about the outward forms. I had taken off the stars, but that was for convenience. It was no point of honour. I was not against them. I was through. I wished them all the luck. There were the good ones, and the brave ones, and the calm ones and the sensible ones, and they deserved it. But it was not my show any more and I wished this bloody train would get to Mestre and I would eat and stop thinking.'

So Frederick, by a decision, does what the boy Nick, in *In Our Time*, does as the result of the accident of a wound. He makes a 'separate peace'. And from the waters of the flooded Tagliamento arises the Hemingway hero in his purest form, with human history and obligation washed away, ready to enact the last phase of his appropriate drama, and learn from his inevitable defeat the lesson of lonely fortitude.

## III

This is not the time to attempt to give a final evaluation of Hemingway's work as a whole or even of this particular novel—if there is ever a time for a 'final' evaluation. But we may touch on some of the objections which have been brought against his work.

First, there is the objection that his work is immoral or dirty or disgusting. This objection appeared in various quarters against *A Farewell to Arms* at the time of its first publication. For instance, Robert Herrick, himself a respected novelist, wrote that if suppression were to be justified at all it would be justified in this case. He said that the book had no significance, were merely a 'lustful indulgence', and smelled of the 'boudoir', and summarized his view by calling it 'garbage'. That objection has for the most part died out, but its echoes can still be occasionally heard, and now and then, at rare intervals, some bigot or high-minded but uninstructed moralist will object to the inclusion of *A Farewell to Arms* in a college course.

The answer to such an objection is fundamentally an answer to the charge that the book has no meaning. The answerer must seek to establish the fact that the book does deal seriously with a moral and philosophical issue, which, for better or worse, does exist in the modern world in substantially the terms presented by Hemingway. This means that the book, even if it does not end with a solution which is generally acceptable, still embodies a moral effort and is another document of the human will to achieve ideal values. As for the bad effect it may have on some readers, the best answer is perhaps to be found in a quotation from Thomas Hardy, who is now sanctified but whose most famous novels, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure*, once suffered the attacks of the dogmatic moralists, and one of whose books was burned by a bishop: 'Of the effects of such sincere presentation on weak minds, when the courses of the characters are not exemplary and the rewards and punishments ill adjusted to deserts, it is not our duty to consider too closely. A novel which does moral injury to a dozen imbeciles, and has bracing results upon intellects of normal vigour, can justify its existence; and probably a novel was never written by the purest-minded author for which there could not be found some moral invalid or other whom it was capable of harming.'

Second, there is the objection that Hemingway's work, especially of the period before *To Have and To Have Not*, has no social relevance, that it is off the main stream of modern life, and that it has no concern with the economic structure of society. Critics who hold this general view regard Hemingway, like Joseph Conrad and perhaps like Henry James, as an exotic. There are several possible lines of retort to this objection. One line is well stated in the following passage if we substitute the name of Hemingway for Conrad: 'Thus it is no reproach to Conrad that he does not concern himself at all with the economic and social background underlying human relationships in modern civilization, for he never sets out to study those relationships. The Marxists cannot accuse him of cowardice or falsification, because in this case the charge is not relevant [though it might be relevant to *To Have and To Have Not* or to *For Whom the Bell Tolls*]. That, from the point of view of the man with a theory, there are accidents in history, no one can deny. And if a writer chooses to discuss those accidents rather than the events which follow the main stream of historical causation, the economic or other determinist can only shrug his shoulder and maintain that these events are less instructive to the students than are the major events which he chooses to study; but he cannot accuse the writer of falsehood or distortion.'<sup>1</sup>

That much is granted by one of the ablest critics of the group who would find Hemingway an exotic. But a second line of retort would fix on the word *instructive* in the foregoing passage, and would ask what kind of instruction, if any, is to be expected of fiction, as fiction. Is the kind of instruction expected of fiction in direct competition, at the same level, with the kind of instruction offered in Political Science I or Economics II? If that is the case, then out with Shakespeare and Keats and in with Upton Sinclair.

Perhaps *instruction* is not a relevant word, after all, for this case. This is a very thorny and debatable question, but it can be ventured that what good fiction gives us is the stimulation of a powerful image of human nature trying to fulfill itself and not instruction in an abstract sense. The economic and the political man are important aspects of human nature and may well constitute part of the materials of fiction. But the economic or political

<sup>1</sup>David Daiches: *Fiction in the Modern World*.

man is not the complete man and other concerns may still be important enough to engage worthily the attention of a writer—such concerns as love, death, courage, the point of honour, and the moral scruple. A man does not only have to live with other men in terms of economic and political arrangements; he has to live with them in terms of moral arrangements, and he has to live with himself, he has to define himself. It can truly be said that these concerns are all inter-related in fact, but it might be dangerously dogmatic to insist that a writer should not bring one aspect into sharp, dramatic focus.

And it might be dangerously dogmatic to insist that Hemingway's ideas are not relevant to modern life. The mere fact that they exist and have stirred a great many people is a testimony to their relevance. Or to introduce a variation on that theme, it might be dogmatic to object to his work on the ground that he has few basic ideas. The history of literature seems to show that good artists may have very few *basic* ideas. They may have many ideas, but the ideas do not lead a life of democratic give-and-take, of genial camaraderie. No, there are usually one or two basic, obsessive ones. Like the religious reformer Savonarola, the artist may say: 'Le mie cose erano poche e grandi'—my ideas were few and grand. And the ideas of the artist are grand because they are intensely felt, intensely realized—not because, by objective standards, by public, statistical standards, 'important'. No, that kind of public, statistical importance may be a *condition* of their being grand but is not of the special essence of their grandeur. (Perhaps not even the condition—perhaps the grandeur inheres in the fact that the artistic work shows us a parable of meaning—how idea is felt and how passion becomes idea through order.)

An artist may need few *basic* ideas, but in assessing his work we must introduce another criterion in addition to that of intensity. We must introduce the criterion of area. In other words, his basic ideas do not operate in splendid isolation; to a greater or lesser degree, they operate in terms of their conquest of other ideas. Or again differently, the focus is a focus of experience, and the area of experience involved gives us another criterion of condition, the criterion of area. Perhaps an example would be helpful here. We have said that Hemingway is concerned with the scruple of honour, that this is a basic idea in his work. But we find that he applies this idea to a relatively small area of experience.

In fact, we never see a story in which the issue involves the problem of definition of the scruple, or we never see a story in which honour calls for a slow, grinding, day-to-day conquest of nagging difficulties. In other words, the idea is submitted to the test of a relatively small area of experience, to experience of a hand-picked sort, and to characters of a limited range.

But within that range, within the area in which he finds the congenial material and in which competing ideas do not intrude themselves too strongly, Hemingway's expressive capacity is very powerful and the degree of intensity is very great. He is concerned not to report variety of human nature or human situation, or to analyse the forces operating in society, but to communicate a certain feeling about, a certain attitude towards, a special issue. That is, he is essentially a lyric rather than a dramatic writer, and for the lyric writer virtue depends upon the intensity with which the personal vision is rendered rather than upon the creation of a variety of characters whose visions are in conflict among themselves. And though Hemingway has not furnished—and never intended to furnish—document and diagnosis of our age, he has given us one of its most compelling symbols.

## GILBERT ARMITAGE THIS TINY STAGE (A MYTH)

*'And that on this tiny stage with luck a man  
Might see the end of one particular action.'*

LOUIS MACNEICE

### I

THE dead are bores. Wrapped in self-regard, it is not surprising that they neither marry nor are given in marriage. Their conversation is all reminiscence and self-pity. Ajax is particularly to be avoided with his eternal—yes *eternal*—grousing about the armour of Achilles, which he says was unjustly awarded to Odysseus after the owner's demise. The only way out is through the gas chamber; but the worst of them won't face it.

Shortly after my arrival in Hades, I found myself discussing our situation with my old friend John Betjeman. It was out of the question to remain for ever in our present state, but we both longed to hear something of England before making the final renunciation. We were accordingly industrious in seeking out and questioning new arrivals from home; but with disappointing results. They were no more enlightening, we found, than those shades who had lived on earth in earlier epochs than our own, and whom at first we had interviewed in such high expectation of learning about the past at first hand. Words are useless to convey what is entirely outside the experience of the person addressed: and even in Hades Sweeney's dictum holds—'I gotta use words when I talk to you'. The only thing would be to go and see for oneself. But how? It occurred to me that I still had with me my old service respirator, and that it might at last be of some use. Wystan Auden, a distant cousin of mine on earth, was employed in a psychiatric capacity on the staff of the place. We decided to approach him. He could do nothing without consulting the Fates. The redoubtable trio took at first an unfavourable view of my project, but at length consented upon the hard condition that my second lease of life should be forfeited in the same instant that I attempted a woman.

Conducted by Wystan I entered the gas chamber unchallenged, wearing my respirator. Soon all about me fell unconscious, and I pretended to do so. Attendants next placed us on board the rocket wherein we were to cross the Deep. As soon as we got under way I crawled into the observation car, and looked out on the realm of Night and Chaos. The scene had not changed much, going by available reports, since the time when Satan made his famous pioneer journey. Hot, Cold, Moist and Dry were still at it hammer and tongs. The noise was deafening, especially when in a bumpy stretch we came down quite low over the battlefield. There was danger too, of stray atoms thrown up by the conflict fouling our propulsive gear. Fortunately we were caught up, like Satan, in an ascending current, and passed fairly high over the pavilion of Chaos; shortly after which I was able to discern on the horizon the first faint influence of Light. As we approached the frontier, my eyes, accustomed to the gloom of Hades, could not endure the brightness; and I was forced to keep them shut, so missing our actual passage into the Upper World.

## II

I was born, they tell me, just before midnight on 24 April 2055, in the township of High Wycombe, in the independent republic of Buckinghamshire.

The boundaries of the republic are those of the old county : the inhabitants number about 150,000. The capital and seat of the government is Aylesbury, with a resident population of 10,000. The remainder of the people are disposed in 35 townships of from 2,000 to 5,000 inhabitants each.

The executive government is entrusted to a council of 37, to which Aylesbury and the townships nominate a member apiece, presided over by an officer appointed by general vote of the people. This body is charged with the whole economy of the republic; and is empowered to make all necessary decisions, and to implement them by decrees and orders. Its competence is, however, subject to the limitation that all policies and laws proposed by it must be approved, and are not infrequently rejected or amended, by the assembly of all citizens over the age of 25, which meets in Aylesbury four times a year or oftener if need be.

The republic produces all the food it requires—having an exceedingly prosperous agriculture—with the exception of salt, which has to be imported from Cheshire or Worcestershire. Sea fish, it is true, is not available domestically ; but the rivers are well stocked with trout, which are carefully preserved. Partridges are abundant, having multiplied with the extension of arable farming ; and pheasants are reared in the woods under government auspices. The question of importing additional food (apart from citrus fruits which are counted necessary for health) is invariably debated with some heat in the Assembly, opponents preferring innumerable other objects upon which, in their view, available foreign exchange could be more desirably expended. I have nevertheless often had salmon from the Spey or the Dee, and oysters from Essex ; and also on occasion delicacies like caviare from overseas. Nor have I ever gone without wine, which the government buys most judiciously when new from the vine-growing countries ; encouraged in this by a vigilant and public-spirited league of wine lovers ; which has as its object the maintenance at an adequate level of the republic's store of this commodity.

In industry too, self-sufficiency is the goal aimed at. Though

many raw materials have to be imported, finished goods are admitted only for special reasons and in small quantities: all essential articles from tractors to tooth brushes are made at home.

Trade of any kind is forbidden to individuals. The State co-operative collects and distributes everything made, grown, or imported. It is appreciated that goods cannot be had except by work, and that the range and quality of articles available for purchase, including foreign luxuries, are determined by the amount of productive work done throughout the State. This gives a realistic tone to discussions in the Assembly where, though priorities are keenly debated, the fundamental point is never lost sight of that the object of policy must be to strike a just balance between the claims of leisure and consumption. Everyone capable of doing so is obliged to work. All citizens receive an equal income whether able to work or not, and irrespective of the kind of work done (except for an efficiency bonus which in practice has seldom to be withheld, owing to the dishonour incurred by shirking or incompetence). Allowances are paid in respect of children up to the number of three, but not beyond, as this might encourage an increase of population beyond the capacity of the country to support. Superior abilities are given full scope in responsible or skilled employment, while artistic or scholarly talents are recognized and encouraged by progressive exemptions from obligatory productive labour.

As the State is the trustee for the people of all 'surplus value' created by their work, there is no call to raise revenue by taxation. Prices are fixed at the minimum which will provide for the cost of administration and public services. In submitting to the Assembly proposals involving public expenditure, the Council appends in respect of each a detailed estimate of its effect on prices, thus furnishing the necessary data for a discussion leading to reasoned approval, amendment, or rejection, in accordance with the prevailing opinion.

A close and perpetual alliance subsists between the States of Great Britain. All trade between members of the alliance and countries oversea is conducted through the agency of a joint import and export board, which, by reason of the quantity of diverse goods it can both order and offer in exchange, is in a good position to make shrewd bargains. This board advises member States what to produce for export.

## III

The most vivid of my early recollections are of exploring the collective farm on which my father worked. When I was born he was a young man, not long down from Eton, the State university. He had taken a first-class honours degree in *litterae humaniores*, and was hoping to be nominated for a post-graduate course at Oxford, still one of the greatest centres of humane learning in Europe. The best way to obtain such a nomination was to publish some original work, and it was upon this that he was engaged at the time of my re-entry into the world. In view of his academic attainments he could probably have obtained a junior administrative post of some kind, but he preferred, as he told me later, to discharge his obligations to the State by manual labour which afforded exercise for the body and relaxation for the mind, and thus kept him fitter and fresher for intellectual work than he would have been in another sort of employment. His hours, except at harvest time or on occasions of emergency, were not above four per day; and as there was no competition for the afternoon shift, most people preferring to get their work finished before luncheon, he generally had his mornings free.

My father having married the daughter of a distinguished architect, herself a woman of ability, it was inevitable I should be elected to a vacancy in the Junior School at Stowe at the age of nine. Children of duller parents stay on for an additional three years at the local school, where all begin to attend at five, and then, unless they display talents above the average, continue their education at an establishment where a more 'vocational' type of training is given than at Stowe.

By the time I passed into the Senior School at the age of fourteen I began to have some inkling of my dual nature. Not only did I acquire Greek and Latin with a facility that astonished my tutors, but I experienced from time to time, especially when we started to read Homer, a sensation of familiarity with lines and episodes which I could not have encountered before. My progress in Russian, on the other hand, was good but not extraordinary.

Games were not compulsory at Stowe in my time: our physical education was cared for on more scientific lines. During the school holidays, however, promising athletes received abundant en-

couragement, sometimes to the point of monopolizing their energies, and even of turning their heads. At High Wycombe in summer the secretaries of the cricket and tennis clubs, and in winter those of the football and hockey clubs, competed in unscrupulous fashion for the allegiance of boys who showed aptitude for both pastimes. Juvenile form and progress were canvassed eagerly in the pubs by veterans long since relegated to the gallery and the touchline; while players in the glory of their prime would coach and bring on their destined successors with an unenvious enthusiasm that afforded a shining, but often neglected, example to beauties and politicians.

At school the time won from compulsory games was devoted to the practical rudiments of farming and mechanical engineering. Boys thus became qualified by the time they left to do an adult's job, either in agriculture or industry. The psychological effects were most beneficial. Moreover this training enabled boys with no particular mechanical bent to acquire, during the years when all boys are fascinated by machinery, techniques and dexterity essential to independence in a mechanized environment.

By the time I was sixteen my mother had died and my father had been appointed to an established post as a teacher of philosophy at Eton. He continued, however, to reside at High Wycombe during the University Vacations, and to observe the routine I had been familiar with all my life. Because of the position he had achieved in the learned world, he was legally exempted from all productive labour, but good form required that he should do *some*; and, in fact, as I have mentioned, he happened to find manual work both complementary and conducive to intellectual exertion. There was policy, too, behind my father's exercises in supererogation. He had discovered to his intimates an ambition, grown livelier since my mother's death, to enter more fully into public life, and had been advised by them to cultivate in peoples' minds an impression of himself in the role rather of Cincinnatus than of Socrates.

When he had been working on the farm my father customarily took his aperitif at a small pub called the 'Rake and Pikel', whither I was now permitted to accompany him. Also a frequenter of this place, where women were never brought, and working clothes could be worn at any time, was Bruno West the painter. He was famous throughout England, and like my father was exempted

from productive labour, a privilege of which he took full advantage, being indifferent to public opinion. He talked as well as he painted, which is to say far better than most painters—a principal reason, by his own account, why he did not paint better—but he showed the same partiality as his less articulate fellow craftsmen for plump girls, of whom he deflowered large numbers, to the envy of their more elongated sisters. Though my father and he were opposed in temperament, a friendship based firmly upon mutual understanding and appreciation subsisted between them. This did not however, dissuade Bruno from gibing at my father's wish to hold public office.

Our visits to the 'Rake and Pikel' were a memorable feature of my school holidays, of which I now spent a good part in my father's company. We often went into Aylesbury to see a play at either the Repertory or the Experimental Theatre; or to inspect an exhibition of painting or sculpture. Hitherto my time had been divided between High Wycombe and Stowe, and I learnt for the first time on these expeditions how every citizen of the State was also a citizen of the Capital. At home a stranger in the town was conspicuous, and received as a matter of course offers of entertainment and help in his business. But it surprised me to discover that my father was almost as generally greeted in Aylesbury as in High Wycombe.

So much for my school days.

#### IV

My father's political career began with a rebuff. He had offered himself (with the permission of the Eton authorities) as a candidate for membership of the committee by which the domestic affairs of High Wycombe were conducted; but in spite of good backing, which included the personal support of our representative on the State Council, he was defeated in the election by the manager of the local paper mill. This result was interpreted by some as an expression of dissatisfaction with the policies of the Council. Certainly at the town meeting where the election took place the successful candidate's friends had accused speakers with whom they disagreed of 'blind devotion to the obsolete fetish of self-sufficiency'. I forget the precise occasion of this allegation, which might without much ingenuity have been imported into the

discussion of half the items on the agenda of this or any similar meeting. Indeed, apart from the fact of my father's discomfiture, only two episodes remain with me: one, the advocacy by a 'right-thinking' woman of a reduction in the gravity of beer brewed in High Wycombe, which was greeted with booing and cries of 'Go and get psycho-analysed', and the other, the familiar question of the old, white-bearded, retired State Councillor, who got shakily to his feet in a tolerant silence, and addressed the Chair as follows: 'Mr. Chairman, I rise to ask my usual question. I am an old man, and my earliest recollections go back almost to the Transition. Yet when I look around me I do not see the physical transformation of our surroundings to which I had looked forward in the days of my vigour. I therefore desire, with your leave, to ask, by way of interpellation, for a report on progress in de-housing.'

Members of the State Council are by custom addressed not as 'Councillor' but as 'Senator'. It was fortunate I was aware of this etiquette, as the following morning, when my father was working in his study as usual, our own member, Nicholson by name, called at the house, and I had to receive him. The purpose of his visit, I heard later, was to acquaint my father with the design of the Senator's intimate circle to nominate him as a candidate for membership of the Political Club. This was a signal honour. Respectable achievement in any field is recognized by election to one of the main clubs, namely, The Humanities (Scholarship, Law, etc.); The Arts; The Archimedes (Science, Medicine, Engineering); and The United Industries. Elections to the Political Club are made from among the most distinguished members of the other clubs (my father was a member of The Humanities). Such is the standing of the Political Club that non-members are seldom elected to the State Council: a self-imposed restriction of choice which operates greatly to the advantage of the public, since an overriding consideration in assessing the claims of candidates for admission to the club is that their characters should be, so far as men can judge, proof against the temptations of power.

Senator Nicholson, it appeared, was more concerned than my father had anticipated at the success of the paper mill manager. The man, he said, was by way of being the leader of a clique in the United Industries Club which was opposed to all the values of the

Transition. They might be described as Mercantilists. The beginning of their deviation was a confusion of means and ends, of goods with the good life. They preferred wealth to leisure, profit to independence, trade to industry, and salesmanship to growing and making things. They had been heard to advocate differential wage rates and a free market in certain commodities. In the name of Commerce they would have justice defied, prosperity endangered, and men corrupted. They might even aim to bring back the Jews. It would not surprise him, the senator added, to learn at any time that our new committee member had been convicted of some such irregularity as accepting commissions, or even of engaging in private trade.

## V

On leaving school everyone starts to receive the normal adult pension. The problem of choosing a 'career' does not arise. Many of the most useful and popular citizens desire neither fame nor responsibility. Energetic types with a practical bent seek to qualify for admission to the College of Management at Cliveden. I had without difficulty won a place at Bekynton College, Eton.

Eton owes much to Oxford both in spirit and in organization. The incidents of university life recalled to consciousness memories of my previous undergraduate existence, and these in their turn fished up from the gulf of amnesia so many associated recollections that my two personalities were now distinct and on a par. One result was an outflow of poetry, the merits of which I am not competent to assess: much of it appeared in undergraduate journals. At the same time, taught by the errors of my former youth, I applied myself with diligence to my studies.

During vacations I did part-time agricultural work, being granted some exemption as a student for reading. At the 'Rake and Pikel' I now took a fuller part in the conversation. I showed my poems to Bruno West, who gave me critical encouragement. A reiterated piece of advice was to keep *myself* out of what I wrote: 'fingerprints are useful for identifying criminals, not works of art,' he said. Much of my first long vacation was spent with this remarkable man, who had undertaken to teach me how to fish. It was an unforgettable summer. On occasions, especially if the fish were not rising, Bruno would sketch. My presence did not

interrupt him. I had the wit not to breathe down his neck or to talk about art. The drawings he did taught me to *see* for the first time, to contemplate the *image itself* on the retina, and not merely to acknowledge or act upon the message it conveyed. We would return in the evenings, after the cricketers and tennis players had left the fields that lay along the home stretch of the river, and hand in our catch at the 'Rake and Pikel'. (All fish and game being public property, sportsmen have to deliver what they kill to an agent of the State Co-operative, for distribution to the people at large.) This was a convenient arrangement as the 'Rake and Pikel' provided a handsome cold supper, in addition to more vital refreshment. When I got home I used to examine with delight the brace of speckled trout which custom permitted me to retain—*incredible* souvenirs of a remote and sedgy world; and lovely as Spenserian epithets or a still life by Braque.

I often went to Aylesbury by road instead of by air, finding on the ground (*daedala tellus*) more to reward the traveller. In spite of the aged senator's discontent with the slow progress of de-housing, its effects were conspicuous to my yet longer experience. No houses fringed the highway between one compact township and the next: you could often drive a dozen miles or more without a sight of brick and mortar. The townships differed in character as in history, but all were alike in the contrast they afforded to that cross-bred conception the Garden City. Dwelling houses were usually constructed in terraces, with entrance doors giving directly on the street. There were few public parks or open spaces within the towns; but behind each house was generally to be found an oblong garden, invisible from the street and divided by high walls from its neighbours. The countryside, though empty of habitations, advertised everywhere man's providence and industry; and I could not help comparing the prosperity I saw now with the state of the same fields and orchards in the days when considerations of commerce and profit had blighted the land.

Aylesbury, as befits a capital city, proclaims the dignity and achievements of man. No haphazard growth has been allowed to impair its form and symmetry. The public buildings, not all, it must be said, of equal merit, are conceived in the grand style, and do not disdain sculptural adornment. As I grew up, the fascination of the capital so took hold of me, I felt as if hitherto I had been 'sucked on country pleasures childishly'.

## VI

During my last term at Eton I was too absorbed by the anxious task of revision against the onset of my Final Examination to apply myself with any freshness to original work. I did however find time to make a selection of what I had written during the past four years, which I sent to Bruno West for his opinion whether it merited publication in volume form. To my gratification he replied after a short interval that he had taken it upon himself to submit my manuscript to the committee of the Arts Club appointed to advise the State Publishing House on new poetry. Meanwhile I kept myself pretty solitary with my nose in my books, too occupied for profitless speculation regarding the committee's verdict.

It was part of my regimen to dine in Hall and not to go out afterwards. One night, however, I allowed myself a dispensation which was to have momentous consequences. I had had, I remember, a particularly strenuous day with the twentieth-century Nominalists, and was beguiled by a fellow member of Bekynton into attending an undergraduate performance of Romeo and Juliet. Exhausted with the dry work of disintegrating Universals, I gave myself up thirstily to the spell of Shakespeare's romantic tale.

Thou art not conquered; beauty's ensign yet  
Is crimson in thy lips and in thy cheeks,  
And death's pale flag is not advanced there.

After the performance the poetry continued to possess my imagination, but evoked only one image—that of Juliet's impersonator. Her name, I ascertained from the programme, was Ann Wither, her college Hawtrey House. When I met her I was tongue-tied. Shortly afterwards I became engrossed, to the exclusion of all else, in the ten days ordeal of 'Schools'.

At breakfast on the morning of my last paper I read in the *Daily Critic*—the officially sponsored *advocatus diaboli* which I always took—that the President of the Republic had been killed in a flying accident. My father went to the funeral, where he met Senator Nicholson and other members of the Political Club. Nicholson, it appeared, was likely to be the Council's nominee for the succession, which meant he had an odds-on chance of being elected; and in this event he proposed to use all his influence to secure my father's election as representative on the Council of High Wycombe.

Presidential elections take place in the Assembly. Only the Council may put forward candidates. If the people reject a candidate, the Council has to make a fresh nomination, to be voted on after an adjournment of not less than seven and not more than fourteen days. At the adjourned meeting it is permissible to propose as an amendment that the original candidate be elected; and such amendments have been carried. Theoretically the process of nomination and rejection could be continued indefinitely, but in practice the Council's first choice is generally, though not invariably, approved. It must be remembered that the Council is a popularly elected body, and that there are no political parties; in spite of keen partisanship on particular issues.

## VII

Though not yet old enough to vote I attended the special meeting of the Assembly called, a few days after I came down from Eton, for the purpose of electing a new President. My father and I spent the preceding night in Aylesbury, he at the Humanities Club, and I at the apartment of a friend who was on holiday in Munich. We walked together in good time to the Assembly Hall, a huge building more convenient than beautiful (Bruno West used to describe the eminent architect responsible for it as a 'long-haired plumber'), which stands on its own about a quarter of a mile outside the city. At the High Wycombe entrance we separated, as I had to go to the gallery provided for those not entitled to take part in the proceedings: my father went for the first time to one of the seats reserved for members of the Political Club. As the clock struck ten, the thirty-five surviving and admissible members of the Council filed on to the platform, and seated themselves behind a long table facing the people. The Presidential chair, raised a little above the others, in the centre of the table, was empty, as was that usually occupied by the representative of High Wycombe. At a separate desk to one side of the platform sat the Attorney-General, whose duty it was to pull up any speaker who made a proposal contrary to any existing law, or inconsistent with any previous decision, not immediately under discussion. As soon as the members of the Council had taken their places, an usher called for silence, and the representative of Buckingham rose, adjusted his microphone, and began to propose the motion

'That Senator K. Hampden Nicholson of High Wycombe be elected President of the Republic'. The applause that punctuated the speaker's words affirmed the popularity of the Council's choice: and intending orators hostile to Nicholson were put off from presenting themselves at the rostrum; from which those who deemed it worth while to address the meeting were soon invited to retire by cries of 'Vote! Vote!' The motion was then put. Votes were recorded by a recently installed electrical system, and the expected result was soon known. The new President was enthusiastically received when he appeared on the platform to deliver his Inaugural Oration. The extracts given below are taken from the official report.

'First my thanks; next my fear; last my speech.<sup>1</sup> My thanks for the honour you have done me you must accept in conventional currency, since I haven't the art to find new words equal to my feelings or the occasion. My fear would be my own super ego, were not the common interest securely fortified by your veto. My speech you must judge without preface or recommendation from me.'

'The self-regarding man is his own slave: he is freest who contributes most to the general good.<sup>2</sup> To serve man the State must invite that service of him, in the performance of which he claims the fulfilment of his nature. The end and measure of the State is the completed nature of man. The means is love. For as Bacon says: "Friendly love perfecteth it"—meaning mankind.

'But what is The State? You will answer by the book "a community of rational beings". To which I reply that there are many such communities which are not States—households, townships, clubs. These are the cells and parts which make up the body of the State. Now limbs and organs cannot survive separated from the body of which they are parts. But a body is not a part of any other body; and the State, likewise, is not a part of any other community. It follows that the State must be self-supporting in all the necessities of life. This does not preclude a moderate

<sup>1</sup> These opening words seem to have been adapted without acknowledgement from the epilogue to Shakespeare's *Henry IV*, Part II. The attentive reader will discern other and more extensive borrowings, notably from Aristotle.

<sup>2</sup> It occurred to my examination-ridden mind that in this passage the President was recollecting, perhaps unconsciously, Kant's doctrine of the autonomy of the will.

and reasonable exchange of superfluities; which indeed makes life more agreeable: but to rely for essentials upon foreigners is to forego autonomy. A State that lives by trade is at the world's mercy. To be a middle-man and a market for others is ignoble, because parasitic, as well as precarious.

'If a State be too small it cannot be self-supporting, at least not above a level of beggarly subsistence. If it be too large it loses the character and quality of a State, besides being incapable of constitutional government. The citizen of an over-large State misses all but the material benefits of living in society.'

'We are happy in being neither too many nor too few, and in the possession of territory that yields us honourable maintenance. Our citizenship is an intimate company, to which strangers are rarely and charily admitted, though we like to entertain them, and do so hospitably. Each of us, poet as well as producer, can see for himself the usefulness of his work and life. Our laws recognize in the State the only *entrepreneur* with clean hands: no one spends himself, like a slave, for another's profit; no gifts are wasted.'

'The part of government in the State is the upholding of justice and the organization of prosperity, functions often exceeded when fanatical and ambitious spirits obtain power, to the inevitable ruin of their peoples.'

On the way back to my lodging I reflected on the President's speech. With what prophetic insight the painter John had written in 1945 of 'the re-birth of human society in the form of an infinite multiplicity of autonomous groups'. There would be much to tell John Betjeman. His prayer 'Come kindly bombs and fall on Slough' had been answered; and wheat grew again where the Trading Estate, the Labour Exchange, and the ghastly 'Social Centre' had once been. What bloody times I had lived in, then!

Behold my child the Business Man!  
And knock his block off if you can;  
Or put a bullet in his liver  
Before he sells you down the river.

The subtle Company Promoter  
Suffers from moral hydrophobia;  
So when you spot him, children, run  
And fetch a farmer with a gun.

The Salesman is the stooge of these,  
 And you may kick him when you please:  
 His psyche is an awful mess—  
 The cavalier of unsuccess.

How the old jingle—meaningless to a more fortunate generation  
 —brought the reek of commerce back to me... and its victims, too,

The silent dumps of unemployed  
 Whose areté has been destroyed.

Looked back on, the Atomic War was a deliverance; perhaps  
 the only possible one.

My father was attending a banquet in honour of the President at the Political Club. I felt in a mood for pleasure, and blessed the forethought which had persuaded me to pack my evening clothes. My plan was to treat myself to a Lucullan dinner, and thereafter to hold myself at chance's disposal. The Chesterton Bar, where I elected to take my aperitif, was empty when I arrived. Glancing through the evening newspaper I remarked that the manager of the High Wycombe paper mill had been arrested on a charge of private trading: if convicted he would get a stiff term of forced labour, of which the President would certainly remit none. . . . The latest murderer, having failed to establish his sanity, was found by the Court to be a person not susceptible of reformation, and would be executed. I had just turned to the foreign page to read about the new series of political disorders raging in half the cities of France, when Bruno West came in full of the news that my book was to be published. As the bar filled up he told everybody, and all offered me congratulations and gin. At length the time came for him to depart: he was to be my father's guest at the Presidential banquet. His going produced an eddy in the crowd, among whom I caught sight of Ann Wither. She was being given a drink by an Eton friend of mine from Wendover. Juliet!

Late that night she came back with me to my borrowed apartment. . . .

'Well?' said John Betjeman.

Atropos is a jealous old bitch.

# STUDIES IN GENIUS: I

## LEOPARDI

FOSCARINA ALEXANDER

To his contemporaries Giacomo Leopardi appeared as the poet of universal sorrow, and the image which has come to us through the years is of the *sombre amant de la mort* of Musset, the 'Job and Lucretius of Italian letters' of Carducci. Yet ever since De Sanctis wrote his famous essay on Leopardi and Schopenhauer many new aspects of the poet have been studied: the early enthusiastic, adventurous Leopardi of the *Canzone all'Italia*, the lover of Plutarch's heroes, the man who exalted a life of action as opposed to one of study. Even the poems written after 1819, when an affection of the eyes and the breakdown of his health brought about the great crisis of his life, no longer appear as a testament of unrelieved pessimism. In the last few years the poet of universal sorrow has become the poet of universal love, and articles and books have been written on 'Leopardian optimism'.

In an oft-quoted passage of his essay De Sanctis says: 'Leopardi produces the opposite effect to that which he proposes. He does not believe in progress, and he makes you yearn for it: he does not believe in liberty and he makes you love it. Love, virtue, glory he calls illusions and he kindles in your breast an inexhaustible passion for them.' Here we see an analysis of the dualism which leads to such different appreciations of the poet and which, as De Sanctis points out, constitutes the dynamic element of his art. While lamenting his insensibility, he clothes the lament in passionate language; imagination and illusion are for him dead in our modern world, yet imagination, 'the primitive fount of human happiness', and illusion, *le care illusioni* that he thought for ever lost, are for ever reborn. Life is an ebb and flow: now we are as gods, now less than the animals who know the peace and content after which we strive.

Around the central idea of illusion all the themes of Leopardi's thought are built. Illusions are youth and youth is life. Old age brings the loss of illusions—death. But illusions are never totally dead, therefore life subsists, sometimes to a great degree when we are joyous and creative, but for the most part to such a small degree that we are as dead.

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Here again we see how two contrary interpretations of Leopardi are possible. If illusion has abandoned us and the world, what is there to live for? Reality is an evil which can only appear good when cloaked by illusion. There is nothing in the world, all is nothingness. Anything we see in it, any joy we may have—illusion. Thus the ‘pessimist’. Yet illusion exists, is never completely dead in man’s heart, has become such an inextricable part of his nature that he sees all through it; it is the very stuff of our lives. There is nothing in the world, but we are so made that we mask reality and fill the void. Through all Leopardi’s poetry this double theme is developed. We never live, for life is always past and always future, memory and hope. We whom imagination and illusion have abandoned are as dead, living corpses; but through imagination and illusion we recapture the past and are again filled with hope.

In Leopardi’s poetry the accent is mostly on pain, on the absence of illusion rather than on its vivifying influence, for everywhere he saw decadence: in himself he saw a great soul handicapped by a weak body, in the world around him a generation of lifeless ‘reasoners’. For Leopardi, the strong inherit the earth. ‘The body is the man’, we read in the *Dialogue between Tristan and a friend*, ‘because (apart from all else) high-mindedness, courage, the passions, capacity for action and enjoyment, and all that ennobles and vivifies life, depend on the vigour of the body, without which they cannot exist. The weak man is not a man but a child, and less than a child, because it is his fate to stand aside and see others live. All he can do is to chatter. Life is not for him.’

In the paternal library at Recanati, in that ‘tomb of his youth’ as he afterwards called it, where he acquired his prodigious knowledge and ruined his health, he dreamed of literary glory, a substitute for glorious and patriotic action. Though unable to emulate Plutarch’s heroes, he hoped to inflame his contemporaries by word, to be a poet in the true sense. ‘Poets,’ he says in *Copernicus*, ‘by stimulating the imagination, give birth to high-minded and vigorous actions.’ The *Canzone all’Italia* and the early patriotic poems are written in this spirit.

Condemned to spend his youth in the death-like atmosphere of Recanati, needing, as he wrote to a friend, ‘love, fire, enthusiasm’, he lived in the past and in the future, in history and in his dreams of glory. In the ancient Greeks he admired above all their athletic

training, their youthful vigour leading to heroic action, their statuesque beauty, all of which he compared with his own sedentary life and subsequent deformity, with his prudent contemporaries. 'I hate the vile prudence which petrifies, fetters and renders us incapable of any great action,' writes this 'Stendhalien'. (It has often been pointed out that his comments on the Rome of his time, that 'necropolis' of philologists and archaeologists, are very similar to those of Stendhal.)

The Greek conception of 'excellence', the 'health and beauty and good habit of the soul' was for Leopardi, as for so many of the romantics, the form in which he clothed his ideal and his dissatisfaction with everyday reality. When confronted with that reality Leopardi rejected it utterly, so greatly did it contrast with his vision. His early years of misery and toil he afterwards described as 'that blessed and beatific age when I still hoped for happiness and in hoping and dreaming of it still enjoyed it', when he *knew* but had not yet *felt* that all is vanity. In youth, he says, ideal and real are one, for we project our vision on the world. When reality and vision fall apart, the dream appears as a mere dream without validity or power to affect the true state of things. The great break in the poet's life, caused by the appearance of truth, is fundamental: it echoes throughout his poetry, it is his poetry. The *Canti* are the lament for the loss of illusion, for the unfulfilled promise, for the interruption of life which he likens to early death:

O natura, O natura,  
Perchè non rendi poi  
Quel che prometti allor? perchè di tanto  
Inganni i figli tuoi?<sup>1</sup>

(*A Silvia*)

The experience which determined his whole attitude to life occurred in 1819 when he was twenty-one years old. His disillusionment had begun two years earlier when, waking after the long night of toil and study which had been his life, he suddenly discovered himself to be a sick, deformed man, doomed to be for ever deprived of love, to 'stand aside and see others live'. In 1819 an affection of the eyes deprived him, for a period, of his sight and of his only distraction, reading. He then experienced a feeling of

<sup>1</sup> O Nature! O Nature! Why do you not fulfil what you promised earlier? Why do you so deceive your children?

tedium so intense as to resemble paralysis. 'I felt myself in the midst of nothing,' he writes in his *Zibaldone* or day-book, 'I felt myself suffocated, reflecting and feeling that all is nothing, solid nothing.'

This vivid apprehension of the void provided Leopardi with a central intuition, a 'truth' from which he never departed and from which he drew his philosophy of life. There is little development in Leopardi's thought. It would seem as if, throughout his short life, he continually relearned by experience what his intuition had initially revealed to him. Great truths, he writes in the *Zibaldone*, 'are not discovered gradually but by a sort of enthusiasm of the reason', akin to the frenzy of the poets who 'at a glance, as if situated in a lofty place, take in as much of the domain of human knowledge as requires many centuries before it be discerned by philosophers'. The truth thus revealed to him by his experience was the nothingness underlying appearances. At the same time the theory of illusion was born. For, were all men to realize such a truth, they would, with the loss of hope, lose all incentive to action. In order to inspire man with a will to live, Nature endowed him with illusions, clothed the 'skeleton of things' in bright garments, created phantoms called love, virtue, glory, in which men acquired faith and for which they were ready to lay down their lives. While they believed in phantoms of virtue and happiness they were virtuous and happy. As illusions receded, as the phantoms were unmasked, as virtue appeared a hollow mockery, so men began to lose all incentive to action, became idle; idleness begat crime. The infinite self-love which is man's impelling force and which had until then been employed in outward action for the common good, was turned inward. Man began to desire for himself an infinite happiness unobtainable in a finite world. Instead of rejoicing in the present, he strove after imaginary pleasures, living in a future always out of reach. With the fading of illusions, the free happy state, the *libera nei boschi pura etade*, gave way to an age of idleness, crime and tedium; the age of illusion gave way to the age of reason.

Illusion or imagination is, for Leopardi, the fount of all goodness. Where the imagination reigns, there is beauty, virtue, sensibility. Such an age is the youth of man and of the world, when the laws of nature and heaven are hidden by the veil of myth, when 'happy error' and hope gladden the hearts of men:

alle secrete  
 Leggi del cielo e di natura indutto  
 Valse l'amenò error, le fraudi, il molle  
 Pristino velo; e di sperar contenta  
 Nostra placida nave in porto ascese.  
 (*Inno ai Patriarchi*)

The integral world of the Ancients is no more; a break has occurred. Since man no longer projects his image on the world, real and ideal no longer merge but exist side by side. The image, left without a corresponding object, is forced to exist in a void and finally perish through lack of nourishment. The happy bond between man and Nature is no more. Since he abandoned her ways and followed the path of reason, Nature is no longer a mother guiding his footsteps but a stepmother, an indifferent or hostile power. 'Madre è di parto e di voler matrigna.'<sup>1</sup> 'Do you think the world was made for you?' Nature asks the Icelander in the Dialogue. 'It is time you knew that in my designs, operations and decrees I never gave a thought to the happiness or unhappiness of man. If I cause you to suffer I am unaware of the fact; nor do I perceive that I can in any way give you pleasure.' All is equivalent, in a meaningless, drifting world where nothing has value, for all value lay in the discarded illusions. It is against such a world that Leopardi's Brutus, once a believer in the power of virtue, rebels. He commits suicide rather than surrender his individuality to a mechanism, an eternal circle of production and destruction.

In *L'ultimo Canto di Saffo*, the poetess holds out her arms in vain to an unresponsive Nature. Her sensibility is unimpaired, but, reflection having intervened, it finds no correspondence in earthly things, it has lost its vivifying power. The world is dead, birds no longer sing, boughs do not murmur, the water draws away from her foot. Nature, in which she once participated, has become a simple spectacle, an object for study. She cannot, like many more fortunate mortals, restore the contact through the deep and powerful experience of love, for she lacks physical

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Vigny, *La Maison du Berger*:

On me dit une mère, et je suis une tombe.  
 Mon hiver prend vos morts comme son hécatombe,  
 Mon printemps ne sent pas vos adorations.

beauty. Sappho too commits suicide, refusing a world where 'only the fair reign over men'. 'The man of imagination, of sentiment, of enthusiasm, deprived of corporeal beauty', we read in the *Zibaldone*, 'is in regard to Nature more or less in the same case as an ardent and sincere lover in regard to a mistress who does not return his love. He rushes forward ardently towards Nature, he feels profoundly all its force, all its enchantment, all its attractions, all its beauty, he loves her with abandonment; but . . . he feels that he has no part in this beauty, so loved and admired. . . . He knows himself to be excluded without hope from and unable to participate in the favours of that divinity which not only is present, but so present, so near to him that he feels her to be within himself and one with himself.'

Thrown back upon himself, the mere spectator of life becomes a victim of tedium, the malady of the clear-sighted, of those in whom reflection has taken the place of action. He can, by dint of distractions, by the cult of ever stronger sensations, by occupying every faculty of the soul attain a certain forgetfulness, an illusion of the infinity to which he aspires. Sappho, in her misery, can still find pleasure in storms and heavy seas. But such palliatives, although recommended by Leopardi (and often mistaken by critics for his final message), are known by him to be a mere sop to an insatiable Cerberus: 'To occupy the soul and not to satisfy desire, which is impossible, but partly to distract it and fill its throat with the cake of insatiable Cerberus: this is the best effect of human pleasure.'

Pleasure is always out of grasp, desire always ahead of realization. When directly opposed desire becomes pain, when simply unsatisfied it is tedium or *noia*. 'Man can never cease to love himself and desire happiness for himself. This desire, when it is not satisfied nor on the other hand directly opposed by that which is contrary to enjoyment, is *noia*. *Noia* is the desire for enjoyment left, so to speak, pure.' Therefore human life is interwoven with pain and *noia*, and one only disappears to give place to the other.

Sensibility forced to operate in a void results in *noia*. The greater the sensibility, the greater the dissatisfaction with the real, the greater will be the resulting *noia* and unhappiness. Who then are the contented, the optimists? The mediocre, the cowardly, those who adopt an ostrich-like attitude towards the evils of life, or

the naïve believers in material progress. Theirs is not a true happiness, but a deadening of the sensibility, a comfortable anaesthesia, or an unwarranted pride. Here we have what appears to be a contradiction in Leopardi's thought and which has often been misinterpreted. When in *La Ginestra* he calls upon men to abandon their illusions and face the truth, is he reversing the opinions of a lifetime, as many critics believe? No, for Leopardi often pointed out in his prose writings that the anaesthesia, the deadened sensibility, the pride of the moderns was a very different thing from the vivifying illusions of antiquity: the former are 'errors of the intellect', born of laziness, reason, science and superstition; they are sterile and degrading. The latter are the 'errors of the imagination', productive of all that is good in the world. So clear-sightedness, the malady of the modern age, the father of tedium, becomes a virtue. Only through it can the cobwebs deposited on men's minds by laziness, error and superstition be swept aside. Only the élite have the courage to face the truth.

The sensitive man of antiquity, happy because he was sensitive, is no more. The poet, whose sensibility soars above that of other men, once the leader who inspired others to great deeds of valour, is now an exile; his superiority separates him from his fellow-men:

Altri anni ed altro seggio  
Conviene agli alti ingegni . . .<sup>1</sup>  
(*Ad Angelo Mai*)

Like the *passero solitario*, the solitary sparrow watching sorrowfully the joyous flights of other birds, Leopardi casts longing glances towards his fellow-creatures. He hovers between an ardent desire for life, be it an inferior one, and the proud realization that unhappiness and solitude are the heritage of the great, that his *noia* is sublime.<sup>2</sup> He neither can nor will accept the values of the world, yet his aspiration towards life is too strong for him to rest in a sublime aloofness. And so we witness the striving

<sup>1</sup> Great minds require another time and sphere.

<sup>2</sup> 'To be unable to be satisfied by the whole of earthly good, even, so to speak, by the whole world, to accuse things of insufficiency and nothingness, and to suffer from a perpetual lack and sense of emptiness—that seems to me to be the chief sign of greatness and nobility to be found in human nature.'

towards a reconciliation of the two impulses, towards the creation of a situation in which infinite and finite can meet and, on a different plane, towards a society where the sensitive can live in harmony with their fellow-men. An instance of the union between ideal and real is the ecstasy described in the famous poem *L'Infinito* where, in the words of Professor Bickersteth, 'the man becomes one with his dream, and the world of space and time disappears—*s'annega il pensier mio*—in the Infinite', where there occurs a 'wrecking of the real in the ideal'. The aspiration towards companionship in a society of sensitive beings is expressed in a letter to his friend Jacopssen: 'En vérité, mon cher ami; le monde ne connaît pas ses véritables intérêts. Je conviendrais, si l'on veut, que la vertu, comme tout ce qui est beau et tout ce qui est grand, ne soit qu'une illusion. Mais si cette illusion était commune, si tous les hommes croyaient et voulaient être vertueux; s'ils étaient compatissans, bienfaisans, généreux, magnanimes, pleins d'enthousiasme; en un mot, si tout le monde était sensible (car je ne fais aucune différence de la sensibilité à ce qu'on appelle vertu) n'en serait-on pas plus heureux? Chaque individu n'en trouverait-il pas mille ressources dans la société? Celle-ci ne devrait-elle pas s'appliquer à réaliser les illusions autant qu'il lui serait possible, puisque le bonheur de l'homme ne peut consister dans ce qui est réel?'

But the nineteenth century, *secol superbo e sciocco*,<sup>1</sup> with its faith in material progress and science, is travelling precisely in the opposite direction. Never were the errors of the intellect more prevalent and the errors of the imagination less cultivated. As unity is denied him, the poet can only retire into his own mind and cling to an image divorced from reality, create a 'double' of the real world. 'To the sensitive and imaginative man', he writes in the *Zibaldone*, 'who lives, as I have for long lived, feeling continuously and imagining, the world and its objects are in a sense double. He may see with his eyes a tower, a landscape; hear with his ears the sound of a bell: and at the same time in his imagination he will see another tower, another landscape, he will hear another sound. In this second kind of object is situated all the beauty and pleasure of things. Sad is the life (and such is life usually) which does not see, does not hear other than simple objects; solely the ones which sensation communicates to the eyes and other senses.'

<sup>1</sup> Stupid and proud century.

'Could I but preserve the lofty vision,' he cries in *Alla sua donna*. For the image suffices in the absence of the real:

E potess'io  
Nel secol tetro e in quest'aer nefando  
L'alta specie serbar; che dell'imago  
Poichè del ver m'è tolto, assai m'appago.

*Alla sua donna*, the *cara beltà*, is the ideal woman that cannot be found on earth. And the image, unless it be tied to the earth, is an evanescent thing, soon to be dispersed by the advent of truth:

A noi ti vieta  
Il vero appena è giunto  
O caro immaginar . . .  
(*Ad Angelo Mai*)

But the absolute 'no' to life uttered by Brutus here becomes an 'if'. If the imagination were always operative, if one could substitute the ideal for the real, happiness would be possible. 'Il n'appartient qu'à l'imagination de procurer à l'homme la seule espèce de bonheur positif dont il soit capable,' we read in the letter to Jacopssen. 'C'est la véritable sagesse de chercher le bonheur dans l'idéal comme vous faites. Pour moi, je regrette le temps où il m'était permis de l'y chercher, et je vois avec une sorte d'effroi que mon imagination devient stérile et me refuse tous les secours qu'elle me prêtait autrefois.' Happy is the man, he will write three years later in the *Epistle to Count Carlo Pepoli*, who in old age as in youth can, deep in his thought, make nature beautiful, make death and the desert live:

Ben mille volte  
Fortunato colui che la caduca  
Virtù del caro immaginar non perde  
Per volger d'anni; a cui serbare eterna  
La gioventù del cor diedero i fatti;  
Che nella ferma e nella stanca etade,  
Così come solea nell'età verde,  
In suo chiuso pensier natura abbella,  
Morte, deserto avviva.

Given the *caro immaginar*, it is possible for a brief moment to bring back to life the world which died with youth, to portray the beauty which rarely appears in the world, 'Il bel che raro e

scarso e fuggitivo appar nel mondo'. If the vivifying spirit is lacking (and this is the conclusion of the poem), then all will be as dead, life a succession of idle pursuits, *noia immortale* the victor in an unequal struggle.

The outcome of the sterility of which Leopardi had complained in 1823 was the *Operette Morali*, a work in prose. When he again wrote in verse in 1826 it was again to stress his sterility and his dedication to that 'bitter truth', *l'acerbo vero*, which he had always combated. 'I seek nothing but the truth which I have so hated and detested,' he wrote to his friend Giordani in 1825. When the spirit is dead, nature becomes a spectacle, an object for study. This state, which had seemed intolerable to his Sappho, Leopardi now accepts with equanimity.

But the truth is that neither at the time of Sappho's lament nor in the 'peace of old age', as he called his present state, had Leopardi ever felt himself completely abandoned by illusion. For that which is such an inextricable part of our nature cannot be entirely effaced. 'Although we are greatly changed', says his Plotinus refuting Porphyrius's arguments in favour of suicide, 'and the power of nature within us is much lessened, we are not so altered but that much of our former self remains, and our primitive nature is not quite stifled within us. . . . And I assure you that neither disgust of life, nor despair, nor the sense of the nullity of things, the vanity of all anxiety and the insignificance of man, nor hatred of the world and oneself are of long duration; although such dispositions of mind are perfectly reasonable and the contrary unreasonable. For our physical condition changes momentarily in more or less degree; and often without any special cause life endears itself to us again, and new hopes give brightness to human things, which once more seem worthy of our care, not indeed to the intellect, but, so to speak, to the sense of spirit.'

The 'truth' revealed by the intellect is for ever denied by the sense of spirit; the imagination will for ever build its own world and a 'double', an 'imago' will exist side by side with the real. The poet, the most sensitive among men, will continue to bring life to 'death and the desert'; by feeling intensely he will make of his very *noia*, which is the negation of life, a thing of life. 'Works of genius', he writes in the *Zibaldone*, 'have this peculiarity that, even when they represent the nothingness of things,

even when they clearly demonstrate and make us feel the inevitable unhappiness of life, when they express the most terrible mood of despair, yet to a great mind, even though it may be in a state of extreme depression, disillusionment, blankness, *noia*, and weariness of life, or in the bitterest and most paralysing misfortunes . . . they always serve as a consolation, rekindle enthusiasm; and though they treat and represent no other subject than death, they restore to such a mind, at least momentarily, that life which it had lost. Consequently that which when seen in the reality of things stabs and kills the soul, when seen in imitation or in any other way in works of genius . . . opens the heart and restores it to life. In any case, just as the author, while describing and feeling so strongly the emptiness of illusions, yet retained all the time a great fund of illusion, and clearly proved that he did, by so eagerly describing their emptiness; likewise the reader, however much undeceived both by himself and by what he reads, is yet drawn by the author into that very deceit and illusion latent in the most intimate recesses of the spirit which he was searching. . . . The very contemplation of nothingness is a thing in these works which seems to enlarge the soul of the reader, to exalt it and satisfy it with itself and its own despair. . . . Moreover, the feeling of nothingness is the feeling of a dead and death-inflicting thing. But if this feeling is alive . . . its liveliness prevails in the mind of the reader over the nothingness of the thing which it makes him feel, and the soul receives life, if only for a moment, from the very violence with which it feels the perpetual death of things and its own death.'

As we have seen, Leopardi had long lamented his inability to believe in the old illusions, yet he had noted their persistence against all reason. In spite of disbelief, the old fancies, *gl'inganni aperti e noti*, still retain their power. This is the theme of *Il Risorgimento*, the poem which marked the end of the period of sterility and was the forerunner of a series of masterpieces. Written at Pisa in April 1828, during an almost happy interlude in a life of bitter struggles against ill-health and financial dependence, it describes the death and resurgence of feeling. It is the illustration of the words of his Plotinus: 'Life endears itself to us again'. Like the exhausted swimmer who once again feels the air fill his lungs, Leopardi exults in feeling itself, in the illusion which, although it knows itself to be a mere illusion, empty of content, can still fill the

soul with joy. His *vaghe immagini* do not correspond to the truth, yet he *feels* them within him and it is *as if* they were true. The heart lives:

Da te, mio cor, quest'ultimo  
Spirto e l'ardor natio,  
Ogni conforto mio  
Solo da te mi vien.<sup>1</sup>

But such a state of grace is necessarily short-lived. 'Où trouver un objet qui le satisfasse?' he had written in the already-quoted letter. Where can he find an object to contain this infinite surge of feeling? Not in the finite world, but in his own world of memories, in the infinite world of youth where image and reality were one. Thus, in the second group of Idylls, his greatest poems, Leopardi returns to that 'beatific age' when, living in hope, he was all that his image was, when he could create his own future:

... arcani mondi, arcana  
Felicità fingendo al viver mio!

Hope created the *arcani mondi*, the 'unknown worlds'; memory can re-create them, for memory is to the past what hope is to the future. The Recanati of the Idylls is an *imago* of his birthplace; Silvia and Nerina an *imago* of the girls he had seen from his window or during his walks, at once the inhabitants and the symbols of that 'beatific' world of youth. Alive and radiant, cut off on the threshold, they represent hope and the blighting of hope. Never has the peculiar quality of adolescence been expressed with such perfection. A time of strife—*di contenti, d'angosce e di desio*—it has a radiance, a life which are never recaptured in later years (when present reality has a hold on us; a double radiance here, illumined as it is by the hope that was its essence and the light shed by memory. Past hopes and present aspirations mingle to form a poetic world with which the real world—the present—is contrasted:

Qui non è cosa  
Ch'io vegga o senta, onde un'immagin dentro  
Non torni, e un dolce rimembrar non sorga;

<sup>1</sup> From you, my heart, this last spirit and native ardour and all consolation, from you alone proceed.

Dolce per sé, ma con dolor sottentra  
 Il pensier del presente, un van desio  
 Del passato, ancor tristo, e il dire: io fui.<sup>1</sup>

No holiday will follow your Saturday, he tells the peasants in *Il Sabato del Villaggio*, for the holiday exists only in your mind, in your anticipation of it. All the joy of life is in the eve.

The *Canto notturno d'un pastore errante dell'Asia*, perhaps the greatest lyric in the Italian language, is *il pensier del presente*, the clear vision of man's state on earth, the expression of 'nothingness' deeply felt and transmuted into poetry. We might apply to it Leopardi's own words, already quoted: 'The very contemplation of nothingness is a thing in these works which seems to enlarge the soul of the reader, to exalt it and satisfy it with itself and its own despair'. It is the evocation of the void which had always been before him: the immensity of time and space, the passing of all things which had struck him with terror and anguish during the sleepless nights of his youth and which he had described in the first Idylls. Man, represented by a shepherd in a vast lonely desert, addresses the moon, *solina, eterna peregrina*. Perhaps she, being immortal, knows the answer to man's eternal questions, the aim of a life full of suffering leading to a 'horrid immense abyss', the reason for the apparently aimless movement of the world and the firmament, the reason why the shepherd, unlike his flock which rests contentedly in the shade, can find no solace in nature:

Dimmi, o luna: a che vale  
 Al pastor la sua vita,  
 La vostra vita a voi? dimmi: ove tende  
 Questo vagar mio breve,  
 Il tuo corso immortale?

. . . .  
 E tu certo comprendi  
 Il perchè delle cose, e vedi il frutto  
 Del mattin, della sera,  
 Del tacito, infinito andar del tempo.

<sup>1</sup> In this spot nothing do I see or hear but an image returns to my mind and a sweet memory arises: sweet in itself, but painfully the thought of the present intrudes; a vain desire for the past, however sad; and the voice: I was.

E quando miro in cielo arder le stelle;  
 Dico fra me pensando:  
 A che tante facelle?  
 Che fa l'aria infinita, e quel profondo  
 Infinito seren: che vuol dir questa  
 Solitudine immensa? ed io che sono?<sup>1</sup>

The shepherd receives no answer and the poem ends with a question. For, the poet implies, no answer can come to us from above. Infinity, symbolized by the moon, has no relation to man. Its eternal movement and man's brief course are parallels which never meet. Vast spaces, mystery surround man, a small point in the infinity of space. In moments of ecstasy, such as the one described in *l'Infinito*, he seems to be lifted out of his mortal frame and to partake for an instant of that infinity. Then the immense silence and the trees rustling in the wind, the dead seasons and the sound of the present are not antagonistic but are merged into one; the poet's thought is drowned in the immensity and experiences a 'sweet shipwreck':

Così tra questa  
 Immensità s'annega il pensier mio.  
 'E il naufragar m'è dolce in questo mare.'

Elevated above himself, illumined by a sort of super-illusion, he is for a moment like a god contemplating the world with new eyes; only to experience a new descent and a new separation.

The opposite mood to that of the shepherd is again expressed in the two poems which follow. *Il Pensiero dominante* and *Amore e Morte* sprang from his passion for Fanny Targioni-Tozzetti, the Aspasia of his later poem; passion which elevated him above the mortal state into a 'new immensity', a 'paradise', where 'wandering under an unaccustomed light', he forgot his earthly condition and lost all trace of reality:

Che mondo mai, che nova  
 Immensità, che paradiso è quello

<sup>1</sup> Tell me, o moon, what avails his life to the shepherd, your life to you?  
 Tell me: where tends my brief wandering, your immortal course?

And you certainly comprehend the wherefore of things and you see the fruit of morning and evening, of the silent, infinite flow of time.

And when I contemplate the stars burning in the sky, I ask myself: why so many sparkling fires? Why the infinite air and that deep, infinite purity? What means this immense solitude? And what am I?

Là dove spesso il tuo superbo incanto  
 Parmi innalzar! Dov'io,  
 Sott'altra luce che l'usata errando,  
 Il mio terreno stato  
 E tutto quanto il ver pongo in oblio.

This is the kind of experience of which, in the *History of the Human Race*, he had said: 'When he (Love, son of celestial Venus) comes on earth, he chooses the tender and noble hearts of the most generous and magnanimous persons. Here he remains for a short time, diffusing in them so strange and wondrous a sweetness, and inspiring them with affections so lofty and vigorous, that they then experience what is entirely new to mankind, *the substance rather than the semblance of happiness*.'

We have seen that for Leopardi supreme happiness is given only when the real is viewed with the eyes of the imagination, when feeling transfigures the world. The rarity and briefness of such experiences, the sway that reality has over man, the impossibility of finding on earth the equivalent of the *imago*—this has been his lament throughout the *Canti*. In *Il Risorgimento* he had rejoiced in feeling alone, in the illusion known to be an illusion which, although it finds no corresponding object, yet transfigures all it encounters. In *Il Pensiero dominante* Leopardi is on the verge of a new experience: of the fulfilment which had always eluded him. For, unlike the dream figures he has hitherto worshipped, a real woman fills his imagination, giving and receiving light. For the first time there exists no disparity between his vision and the earthly object; the *angelica beltade* lives not only in his mind but on earth, the *imago* finally held will abide with him eternally:

E tu per certo, o mio pensier, tu solo  
 Vitale ai giorni miei,  
 Cagion diletta d'infiniti affanni,  
 Meco sarai per morte a un tempo spento:  
 Ch'a vivi segni dentro l'alma io sento  
 Che in perpetuo signor dato mi sei.<sup>1</sup>

I said Leopardi was *on the verge* of a new experience. For the poem is called *Il Pensiero dominante* and, as has often been pointed

<sup>1</sup> And you, certainly, my thought, you who alone are vital to my days, beloved cause of infinite cares, will remain with me until my death: for in my soul I perceive clear signs that you are to be my perpetual master.

out, the poet still addresses his thought rather than the woman. He stands midway between the old world of disunity and a new world of unity in which he cannot fully believe. His experience is now seen as real, now as a 'dream similar to the dreams of the immortals'. But if it be a dream, the poet says, it is one so powerful, so steadfast against the assaults of reason that it is one with truth, the 'substance' and not the 'semblance'.

In order to experience such a moment of *beatitudine* a lifetime of suffering was well worth while. All past torments come into focus. All opposites are reconciled in this new realization of the meaning of life:

Pregio non ha, non ha ragion la vita  
 Se non per lui, per lui ch'all uomo è tutto;  
 Sola discolpa al fato,  
 Che noi mortali in terra  
 Pose a tanto patir senz'altro frutto.<sup>1</sup>

As life is transfigured by love, so is death. The *abisso orrido immenso* which had appeared to the clear-sighted shepherd, the Nirvana, the state free from pain and tedium for which the poet had longed, become, in *Amore e Morte, bella morte pietosa*, the twin of love, the comforter of every noble heart. Made greater by love, the soul is enabled to contemplate existence and death from a new height. Infusing his feeling into the whole of creation, he becomes again, like the Ancients, 'wise in action and not in vain thoughts'; he acquires a more than human strength for the battle against fate in which every *nobil natura* must engage. Death, the deliverer from pain, when it comes, will find him 'fully armed and at war with fate':

Me certo troverai, qual si sia l'ora  
 Che tu le penne al mio pregar' dispieghi,  
 Ertà la fronte, armato,  
 E renitente al fato.

In these two poems we have an affirmation of life which was implicit in all previous negations. In so far as we love we are masters of the world and of fate.

But what if that strength fails and the illusion, although a

<sup>1</sup> No value, no reason has life except by it, for it is all to man; the only justification of fate which placed us mortals on earth to suffer otherwise so fruitlessly.

'dream of the immortals', proves to be mortal? Then nothing remains but man alone, disarmed but still defiant, against the 'ugly power which operates against us', and the 'infinite vanity of all things':

Omai disprezza

Te, la natura, il brutto  
Poter che, ascoso, a comun danno impera,  
E l'infinita vanità del tutto.

These are the closing lines of *A sè stesso*, the record of a disaster. Nature, no longer merely indifferent, is now identified with Arimane, the Power of Evil, the hostile ruler of mankind. 'Fate gave our species no other gift than death.' Yet it is not to death that he turns, but rather to the stoical defiance of fate which he had voiced in *Amore e Morte* and, years before, in the *Dialogue between Tristan and a friend*. 'To look steadily on the desert of life, to hide no part of our unhappiness. . . . This philosophy . . . gives the courageous man the proud satisfaction of being able to rend asunder the cloak that conceals the hidden and mysterious cruelty of human destiny.'

In order to defy fate 'with head erect and fully armed', a preliminary shedding of all prejudice and error is necessary. In his own case, he must brush aside the error into which he had fallen and which consisted in identifying the real, in the person of Fanny, with the ideal image of his mind. In *Aspasia* he attempts to return to the dualism of *Alla sua donna*, an idealism which denies value to all but the vivifying spirit. A beautiful woman, he says, may so bewitch men that they believe it is she whom they love, but in truth they continue to love their own ideal. 'Not you I loved,' he says, 'but the Goddess who once had life, now a sepulchre in my heart. It was the Goddess I contemplated in your eyes and, having from the beginning seen clearly through your artifice and fraud, for her I bore long and hard slavery.' *Me di me privo* is the way in which he describes his slavery as he struggles to rid himself of his physical love for the very real Aspasia, to transform her into an *imago* and return to the free world of ideas. Life without love is 'a starless night in midwinter', *notte senza stelle a mezzo il verno*; but there is 'proud satisfaction' in freedom from what had been a form of slavery because based on an error, in the return to a clear vision of things.

In *Sopra il ritratto di una bella donna*, the lady, once fair, now turned to mud and bones, a foul and sad sight, reflects the violent changes to which man is subjected and, in particular, his own unhappy experience. 'Thus does fate reduce that which seemed to us the most living image of heaven.' Such is the mortal state. One day inspired by beauty, fount of sublime thoughts and noble feelings which seem to offer a promise of 'superhuman fates, fortunate reigns and golden worlds':

Oggi d'eccelsi, immensi  
Pensieri e sensi inenarrabil fonte,  
Beltà grandeggia, e pare,  
Quale splendor vibrato  
Da natura immortal su queste arene,  
Di sovrumanî fati,  
Di fortunati regni e d'aurei mondi  
Segno e sicura speme  
Dare al mortale stato.

Tomorrow the slightest of causes will destroy that Paradise in an instant and transform the angelic vision into a 'foul sight, abominable, abject'. What then is man? If wholly worthless, mere dust and shade, why such lofty thoughts? he asks, echoing Pascal. If partly noble, why are his worthiest thoughts and feelings aroused and quenched by such ignoble causes?

Natura umana, or come  
Se frale in tutto e vile  
Se polve ed ombra sei, tant'alto senti?  
Se in parte anco gentile,  
Come i più degni tuoi moti e pensieri  
Son così di leggieri  
Da sì basse cagioni e desti e spenti?

Unlike Pascal, Leopardi leaves the question unanswered. It is an 'eternal mystery of our being', *misterio eterno dell'esser nostro*. Life is an eternal and inexplicable ebb and flow. Very early in life Leopardi had rejected the Christian view or indeed any definite view of man's ultimate destiny. Although he belongs to his century and his accent is romantic and religious, he is drawn to the eighteenth-century 'Philosophes' whose agnosticism serves to dissipate dogmatism and the 'errors of the intellect'. To the

nineteenth, 'proud and stupid century', he opposes the eighteenth, the century of enlightenment.

'Such is life usually,' Leopardi had said of the real, as opposed to the imagined, existence. Yet, in the *notte senza stelle a mezzo il verno* one light remains: the comfort of human companionship and love. Why, he asks in *Sopra un Basso Rilievo antico sepolcrale*, does death, our liberator, come to us in funeral garb? Why do we fear the port more than the storm? Because Nature, who cares not for us, has decreed that our end too must be sad and that, in dying, we must abandon those we love. His Plotinus, when urging Porphyrius to abandon his project of suicide, had said: 'Do not wish to be the cause of such great sorrow to your good friends who love you with all their soul. . . . Let us live, dear Porphyrius, and console each other. Let us not refuse our share of the sufferings of humanity, apportioned to us by destiny. Let us cling to each other with mutual encouragement, and hand in hand strengthen one another better to bear the troubles of life. . . . In the last hour our friends and companions will comfort us, and we shall be gladdened by the thought that after death we shall still live in their memory and be loved by them.'

Thus, after his descent from the great heights of *Il Pensiero dominante*, Leopardi turned again to life, but to life on another plane, to life in what he called the desert. The ideal existence he had, except in rare moments, found impossible of attainment. The other existence—the real—he had at first rejected. But very soon he had come to see in man's awareness, in his acceptance of fate, the greatest proof of his nobility:

Nobil natura è quella  
Ch'a sollevar s'ardisce  
Gli occhi mortali incontra  
Al comun fato, e che con franca lingua,  
Nulla al ver detraendo,  
Confessa il mal che ci fu dato in sorte.<sup>1</sup>

'Nothing demonstrates more clearly the power and greatness of the human intellect,' he writes in the *Zibaldone*, 'the loftiness and nobility of man, than his power of knowing and entirely comprehending his smallness. When he, considering the plurality of

<sup>1</sup> Noble spirit is he who dares to confront with mortal eyes our common fate and who, with frank speech, subtracting nothing from the truth, avows the evil which has been given us for our portion.

the worlds, feels himself as the infinitesimal part of a globe that is the smallest part of one of the infinite systems that make up the World, and in this consideration he marvels at his smallness . . . is almost one with nothingness and almost loses himself in the incomprehensible vastness of existence; then with this act and with this thought he gives the greatest proof possible of his nobility, of the strength and immense capacity of his mind, which, enclosed in so small and infinitesimal a being, has attained to the comprehension of things so superior to his nature, and can embrace and contain within his thought this same immensity of existence and of things.'

*La Ginestra*, the long philosophical poem written shortly before his death in 1837, is a breviary of stoicism and love. To the man of his century with his belief in progress, his arrogance and his delusions of self-sufficiency, he opposes the man who comprehends his smallness, the man whom, like Pascal's *faible roseau*, the whole universe conspires to destroy. Only when men realize this fact will they cease to fight amongst themselves and unite in brotherhood against their common enemy, fate. The *ginestra*, the broom, *fior gentile* of the desert, growing in the shadow of Vesuvius where once-prosperous cities lie buried, will one day be obliged to bow its head before the torrent of lava, a head never yet lowered in cowardly supplication nor held erect in frantic pride towards the stars. Among the ruins, as though pitying the sufferings of others, it sends up to heaven a sweet scent that 'consoles the desert':

Or tutto intorno

Una ruina involve,  
Dove tu siedi, o fior gentile, e quasi  
I danni altrui commiserando, al cielo  
Di dolcissimo odor mandi un profumo  
Che il deserto consola.

The *odorata ginestra* is Leopardi's last happy symbol, containing in itself a last vision of man and his destiny. Tenacious and sweet-scented, it is the image of the *nobil natura* as he conceived it, stoical and loving. Man has to wage a lifelong battle against fate. Let him then, being fully conscious of its power, accept the challenge, and, by the power of love, comfort and transform the waste land.

ATHELSTAN RENDALL

# WHERE SHALL JOHN GO?

## XII: TENERIFFE

MY DEAR JOHN,

You have already had a good deal of advice as to where to go next winter, the Government willing. One of your great uncles plumped for Egypt, I remember, every time, and was happy nowhere else. I expect you hardly remember Uncle Cedric. He had a simpler taste. He liked a place as little touched by civilization as possible, and year after year went to Teneriffe. All he asked was a good climate, fairly simple conditions of living, and no fuss. He liked to know the people of the place he lived in—not one class, but all kinds, and he worked hard at his Spanish so that he could talk to them. Before long he could talk to his barber and tobacconist, to the hotel gardeners, the labourers and the fishermen, and especially to the women who came to the hotel to take orders for needlework and sell flowers. They were all his friends. He didn't really like travelling. He said he wanted existence under perfect physical and mental conditions. And by mental he meant there must be no, or at least few, sightseers, cinema or dancing fans, no shopping streets or beggars. A few of his own race he liked, but only if they remained silent till they had something worth saying. I wonder how far his taste suits you. A bit cornery was old Cedric, but I think he got hold of the right end of the stick. Anyhow, I've followed his example, and from '32 up to the war I never deserted the place, and here I am back again, I am thankful to say.

How do you get there? There is a good air route: London to Madrid one hop; Madrid to Las Palmas another, and then half an hour flying to Teneriffe. This costs (single) about £50. The Olsen oil boats from London, with some sixteen good cabins, go weekly. Return fare is £36 and your car costs £10 each way. Before the war I could afford to go out *via* Paris, Irun, Madrid, Seville and Cadiz, and the two-day sea voyage by the excellent boats of the trans-Mediterranean Company. I hope, John, you will try that route. When you do, remember that one or two stops off the

train are well worth while. I needn't tell you what you can see at Burgos, Madrid and Seville, all of which you will pass through. But not yet: the British consuls in Spain write me that Spanish trains are at present impossible.

But now comes the question: do you want to go to Teneriffe? Why not somewhere else? Well, here is some personal experience for what it's worth. My dear John, up to the age of fifty I was chained to the House of Commons and to earning my living—or thought I was. Only the Riviera for a fortnight was possible in those days. When I became my own master I experimented first in South Africa. What a joy that was. I was—and you would be—entranced by Cape Town and its peninsula. I even liked Johannesburg, and motored from that place all round the east coast back to Cape Town. En route I climbed—or my pony did—the Drakensburg Mountains. All your pet words, John, go for that journey: 'Marvellous', 'Wonderful', 'Incredible', though riding all day in flannels is not kind to the backside. It was then that I discovered Hermanos and stayed there some months in the following two years. It is ninety miles from Cape Town and twenty from a railway station. Two or three good second-class hotels, and not expensive. Bathing on a glorious coast, a sandy beach, flat red-hot rocks to lie on with marvellous seas in stormy weather. Mountains half a mile from the village where rare wild flowers and an occasional springbok may be found. Why, you may well ask, leave such a climate and such a place for Teneriffe? My main reason is that two voyages covering nearly forty days is too big a price to pay even for South Africa. And remember that a first-class return fare was about £170 before the war and now is much more.

I know some of the family are interested in the West Indies, and I expect they'll tell you to go there—and you certainly must one day. I did a few years ago, in a very uncomfortable old banana boat which took a good month on the double voyage. Jamaica is very interesting and very English. Hotels good and expensive. Continuous great heat, no cool nights, mosquito nets essential. There are many good places to stay at, but I think the high spot is a very English hotel run by an English colonel and his wife at Ocho Rios. There you bathe almost under the branches of palm trees, coconuts are falling into the sea, and you return to what is a perfectly run country house in tropical gardens.

Now about Teneriffe. You will arrive at Santa Cruz, the capital of the island and a busy port. On no account stay there. The hotels are all very indifferent. Drive straight to Puerto Orotava—twenty-five miles across the island—and make that your headquarters. Some English and German business people live at Santa Cruz but the residential English—some thirty or forty families—have made their homes at Orotava. Now, before I attempt greater heights, let me give you the material advantages Orotava can offer. As to hotels: the largest and best is the Taoro, a big three-sided building with large and lofty rooms. Its nominal front—really its back—looks at the lovely little port with its little harbour some three hundred feet below the hotel, and in the far distance the island of La Palma. On its other side the hotel rooms face the morning and afternoon sun, and from most of them you see the fascinating old town of Villa Orotava some way up the mountain with the wonderful peak dominating all. This hotel has well-laid-out gardens, some hundred bedrooms, most of which have recently, following a fire, been rebuilt with very fine bathrooms attached. The hotel has quite a fair billiards table. The food and cooking since the war have actually improved and no hotel that I have met with in England or France gives such plentiful meat, fish, eggs and butter. All vegetables, oranges, lemons, bananas, grape fruit are in great abundance. The Taoro Hotel garden has dozens of paw-paw trees laden with fruit which will be ripe in February. Alcoholic drinks since the war are at English prices for whisky; Spanish gin half our price, ditto brandy and vermouths. But the local wines, quite drinkable, remain cheap, and at eight pesetas a bottle (pesetas are sixty-six to the pound sterling) one's wine need only cost two shillings a bottle in the hotels and about half that price in the shops. The Taoro charges, which were from four to five pounds weekly pre-war, are now from about fifty pesetas with full board. Cheaper hotels can be found in the puerto. They give excellent accommodation and one of them feeds you well on a genuine Spanish diet. A particularly nice section of the English middle-class fills these hotels regularly. Within a quarter of a mile of the Taoro is an English church (closed), a club that nestles in a perpetual bower of flowers and offers tennis, badminton, bowls and golf croquet on excellent lawns. Close by is the English library with several thousand books. All one's 'laches' in the reading of the novels, biographies and the lighter literature of the

last fifty or seventy years can be made good here. Amongst other books I found a complete edition of Henry James, Greville's, Creevy's and Croker's Memoirs and lots of books few libraries can offer one, and was amazed to find how many of them I hadn't read. I think, John, if you admit to a partially misspent youth, you might do worse than have a look at this library if you decide to come out. Mrs. Grundy has rather governed the selection, but maybe it's a healthy change of diet for a short time.

Now a word as to the bathing at the puerto. It is true that during the months we leave our wintry shores for the sunny ones of Teneriffe, the seas there are often so tremendous that none but the local youths dare enter them to swim. They are truly marvelous swimmers and perform miracles of daring that draw gasps of admiration from visitors. These can take a foam bath on the shore. Facing a big wave and being rolled over by it is quite good fun. Alternatively, long ropes attached to the little esplanade are bound to you if you want to be a little more courageous, and meanwhile the local guardia is supposed to protect you though he certainly couldn't. On ordinary days you swim in the sea or in pools among the rocks, and then lie on the black sand—black because of its volcanic origin—your skin growing darker every minute in the hot sun while you gaze up, spellbound at the peak, white and silver against the dark foothills and cerulean sky. At your choice, and for the more timid, a most excellent swimming bath, open, has recently been made close to the sea. Another almost natural swimming bath, carved out of the rocks and refilled by the sea at high tide is to be found at Bajamar. This bath has the charm of almost complete solitude. It is about fifteen miles from Orotava and about five from Tacaronte.

Now as to the country. Always the Peak: the wonderful Peak dominates all. Twelve thousand feet in height, and usually covered with snow during January and February. But from the puerto up to some eight or nine thousand feet there is a bewildering and constant change in the country you look at. You must take your car to Teneriffe, John. Best to buy an old Ford. All the local cars are Fords, and you can therefore get a Ford mended and new parts if necessary. But you can still hire car and driver very cheaply. Your first drive must be up the Peak. Three miles will bring you to Villa Orotava, a considerable place and of much beauty. Many of the old houses have handsome lattice-work

balconies, and if one is fortunate enough to be invited inside one finds a cool and quiet patio which seems to breathe the romance of another time. There will be flowers and plants and a tiny fountain, a heavily carved stairway leading to a gallery above, and rooms with ornately painted ceilings. Go and see the hospital, an old building superbly placed. You will see in the enormous old door a revolving barrel-shaped box. Outside it presents nothing remarkable. But push it and it moves round and brings into view the interior of the box in which is a tiny bed all made up and ready for a baby. Here the matron told us any girl might bring her child and leave it with the assurance that it would be looked after and no questions asked. I confess I wondered. The matron was a dear old thing, and talked very freely in fair English. She shook hands with my friend when we left, and I held out my hand for the same purpose. But she smiled and, refusing my hand, said very sweetly: 'With a man I may not'. From the Villa the road rises more sharply, and you are soon passing through small hamlets, and before long there are only isolated cottages. Each cottage has its flowers and small pieces of ground on which a little corn and vegetables are grown. Innumerable children spring up from the roadside spurred by the sound of the car, offering bunches of flowers. Another three or four miles and we are at Agua Manza. This is the water-head where by an ingenious system it is collected and carried by large surface pipes to the valley below. In the barrancos, as one drives through the heather, the unusual sight of beehives is to be seen apparently carved out of the underlying cliffs. Honey should be plentiful and good in Teneriffe, but it is neither. Still climbing, you proceed on your way and will notice how good your road is. This is a monument to Primo de Rivera, the dictator placed in power by Alfonso, the last Spanish king, in a forlorn effort to save his throne. No doubt the road was made to add to the attractiveness of the island, but with a population always on the verge of starvation it is hard to justify. On you go, passing miles of high-standing heather with the trees getting more stunted and the mountain more stony. At every turn of the road you find yourself facing the sea, the Villa and the lovely country you have passed through. Eventually the road ceases to climb and enters the vast volcanic plain that surrounds the Peak. Here there is a plateau of rock and scrub. Find a windless spot and have your

lunch. Afterwards you can walk or drive to the observatory where, I am afraid, friend Franco has failed to find the funds necessary for much research. Don't forget to grease your face and hands whilst on the mountains unless your skin is already pretty hardened. Otherwise the sun and the wind at this height will leave you sorry you came.

Another interesting visit of a different kind can be made to Laguna. This is the University centre, as well as the ecclesiastical. The cathedral is worth looking at, and many of the houses have merits which are not ordinary. The town is in the real agricultural centre of the island and, being much higher than Orotava, is much cooler. From Laguna several choices are open. I think you should first take the drive over the wonderful new road to Esperanza. This, if your headquarters are at Orotava, is a day's excursion. You will eventually come to what is, on a small scale, a truly magnificent forest of huge trees and luxuriant plants of great variety and size. There are lovely open spaces, steep inclines and unexpected views to be got of sea and island as you climb. It was at Esperanza that Franco hatched his conspiracy against the Republican Government, and an announcement to this effect in politer language is to be found on one of the trees. This makes a splendid picnic place. As you eat your lunch leaning against a fallen tree, women of the village below come down the hillsides with stacks of wood and other fuel loaded on the backs of mules. They are accompanied by small children, some of whom, though very shy, probably stop behind to watch you eat your lunch with longing eyes. They never come very near or annoy, but wistfully stand and stare. You can do something for them if the hotel has provided you with any dry bread. Alas, if you have only bread and butter to offer they refuse it. They don't use butter in their homes and won't touch it. Another good day's drive you will again go to Laguna, but turning left instead of right, you make for the high hills or mountains of Mercedes. On this drive you pass through the most highly cultivated land Teneriffe possesses, and as your road rises you find yourself in roads deeply dug out of the mountain side, and once again in the midst of luxuriant vegetation. You reach the top and find a shack where I think some form of local wine can be obtained, and there is a bit of flat land where you can park your car. From there you walk where you will in as wild a piece of country as you can desire. Some walks take you to the tops of various small

peaks from which you will see parts of the island you have never seen before and scattered homesteads in lonely spots.

Those who genuinely want to explore the island are somewhat cramped by the difficulty of finding accommodation, and must generally limit themselves to daily excursions. At Vilaflor, the highest and most attractive little place in the Canaries, an American woman before the war found its primitive solitude so enchanting that she rented a humble little fonda, isolated 130 feet above the village, and was willing occasionally to put up small parties. I hear she has gone and do not yet know if her fonda is still open. A long dusty drive from Santa Cruz with innumerable hairpin bends on the south of the island is one way of reaching Vilaflor, perched up 4,540 feet on the mountain side; but up and over the range from Orotava and down the other side on mules is the real way to go and one never to be forgotten.

Drive up 7,000 feet to meet your muleteers. They will have set out at first light to be in time for the rendezvous. This will be in the Cañadas, the vast basin surrounded by distant mountains and from which the Peak rises solitary and formidable in the middle. It would seem impossible to discover a living soul in this scene of desolation, a pumice-stone desert intersected by lava streams and many-coloured cinder heaps; nevertheless your driver will soon find the little group of threadbare men waiting for you with their skinny mules.

Then take your choice of these rather sorry steeds, and mounted you will pick your way over the villainous surface towards the Pass of Guajara (7,874 feet). Anyone, however ignorant of a horse's back, may mount such mules with confidence. They slither down slopes of lava, climb rocks and balance on the precipitous edges and, defying their masters and riders, choose little detours which invariably prove the best way.

On the southern slopes the stony paths continue unrelieved by vegetation, unless you have the good fortune to spy, on a cinder heap, a patch of the rare endemic violet (*Viola Teydensis*) which may even be found flourishing bravely at 11,000 feet.

Late in the afternoon the pines become numerous, some of immense size, and the sound of rushing water quickens the pace of the tired animals, and Vilaflor with its innumerable little terraces of cultivation, a haze of pink almond blossom and wreaths of blue smoke rising from the huddle of rough stone cottages,

makes a sweet sight for tired sunburnt eyes. The rooms at St. Rocque are bare and very simple, and you wash in icy spring water in enamel basins, but a heavenly content creeps over you as you sit eating eggs and honey on the little terrace, drowsy with the strong air and the smell of the pines and watch the sunset warm the distant peaks of Gran Canaria. If you have thick coats and are not sluggards, you will be up at 5.30 a.m. to watch the sunrise, a 'glory chambered mortals view not'. Later you will take lunch and mules again and make excursions into heights and barrancos of romantic beauty, and with views of other islands surpassingly lovely; and at night, if you have the right approach and remember to take up a bottle of wine from the village, you may persuade the muleteers and their women to come and sing to you. They are very shy, and their songs are more plaintive than musical; but we warmed them all up by teaching them *Auld Lang Syne*. Grasping the very horny hands of these peasants was a queer sensation, but it won their hearts and we heard them murmuring '*Simpatico*', and our hostess wrote us weeks after that they were still singing the air of *Auld Lang Syne* on the mountain side.

Here, John, I am going to interpolate a few words about the climate. If you are as wise as I think you are your reaction to that remark will be: 'Is this chap as big a liar as the rest of my advisers?' Well, here are the facts. I have stayed in Orotava for four months at a time and had only one day's rain. In other years there have been hurricanes lasting a day and a half with wind and rain so heavy that the banana fields have been partially destroyed, and some of the big windows of the hotel smashed. But this is very rare. In a really 'bad' season there is very little rain, not much wind, and the worst that happens is that there is a larger proportion of dull, but not cold, days. On the whole it is fair to compare Teneriffe's winter months to our very best and warmest summer weather. That means that at midday you may think it a bit too warm. But the remedies are easy for that. There is the seashore with always a gentle breeze. And there are the drives to higher climes. In a quarter of an hour in your car you can be two or three miles up on the way to the Peak, and at once in a cooler

zone, braced up and happy to return to the warmer climate you left.

This discourse to you, John, is a mixture of information picked up on my many long visits and of my doings, excursions and gossips with Teneriffians of all sorts and has made me very interested in the people. You probably know that their main job is the growing of bananas at horribly low wages. These got better after the first Great War and by interesting means. The men struck and were out for a long period and were approaching starvation and defeat. The two largest firms of growers, one English and the other American, were willing to grant the men's claim when pressure from the local Spanish growers induced them to abandon their tardy sense of justice. Suddenly the Left-wing intellectuals at Santa Cruz took a hand in the game and let the English dock workers know what the fight was about. The dock workers were impressed and refused to unload the banana boats unless the men's demands were granted. Following this the directors of the two big companies conferred and sent orders to Teneriffe that the men's demands were to be granted. The Spanish growers had to come to heel and the men won when on the point of giving in. So you see, John, that our old friend the brotherhood of man is not a complete fiction. The mass of the workers are kind and have excellent manners. They wear cotton clothes which are always clean but seem to me a bit cold for much of the weather. During the Spanish War they seemed 'Red' to a man and 'Socialism' was chalked up on many a wall. They have little use for their church and when the Republicans won the last election their elation found vent in processions which rather alarmed the upper classes and the English residents. Franco was the governor of Teneriffe at the moment when he left it to fight against the Republic in Spain. But he saw to it that all the Left leaders were imprisoned on the hulks at Santa Cruz or in prisons on land before he left. Thenceforth there were horrible beatings and many cruel deaths. Most of the population were dumb from fear whilst the employers and, alas, the English residents, made Franco their hero and became Fascists to a man and woman. These

Francophils nourished the amusing fiction that the masses were really with them and would say so but for their tyrannical leaders. But I got much evidence from women who did odd jobs for us and from drivers of hired cars that the moment they thought they could safely unburden their souls they showed an intense hatred of Franco and all he stood for. But that, of course, was pre-war and there seems now to be a general tendency to avoid talk of politics altogether.

I have met a few of the Teneriffe landowners and banana growers, but chiefly their sons who generally seem to manage the business. They have generally been to English and German schools for a year or two. They have a slight acquaintance with both languages and often a little French. Surprisingly these brief excursions to foreign climes seem to have provided them with no cultural background and not the faintest knowledge of the trend of world affairs. But they have considerable charm and it is always pleasant to have them to dine. Their views on such questions as their duty, political, economic and moral to their fellow subjects on whose labour they live are either non-existent or archaic past belief. But, of course, they are devout Catholics to a man. And to me the mere incredibility of their opinions makes it amusing to meet them.

There, John, is my picture of Teneriffe, and I hope you may soon join me there and we will bathe in its warm sea-water and re-do some of my excursions.

## CORRESPONDENCE

*To the Editor of HORIZON*

22 January 1947

IN the name of the CIAM (Les Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne) to which attend the leading modern architects, I would like to communicate to you our disagreement about the way of putting the Lawn Road Flats into a group of ridiculous houses in your December number, 1946. It seems to us absolutely absurd that the building of Wells Coates, erected in 1934 as the first modern building in England after the sleep of three decades, is brought in that kind of relation, and completely inadequate with the literary and artistic line of your highly estimated magazine.

Very sincerely yours,

S. GIEDION,  
Secretary-General to the CIAM

*To the Editor of HORIZON*

10 January 1947

READING the December issue of HORIZON I was baffled to find the Lawn Road Flats near Belsize Park, London, brandished under the caption 'Ugly Buildings Competition'.

I lived in these from 1934-7 and remember the building, which I know very well, to be cheerful and good to live in. Its design—by Wells Coates—is a result of careful study of contemporary living. If the colour of the building should be unattractive at present this cannot veil the basic soundness of this handsome building of which I thought London could be proud.

I fail to understand the point of view of the jury making this derogative award.

Very truly yours,

WALTER GROPIUS

*Dear HORIZON*

I ALSO think that Lawn Road Flats are hideous. Photographed from the other side perhaps they would be less so. At the beginning of the war I lived in one, and did give it some high marks for practical good ideas and convenience, but it was box-like and claustrophobic with a perpetual smell of cooking drifting in which made me sick.

I think it a pity that when awarding the ugly prize you didn't know the architect, date, etc., since to me the fact that Lawn Road tried so hard and was cracked up to be the best that anyone could produce increased the horror. No doubt it made useful and sensible practical advances but it is monstrous to look at and, after all, the competition was for looks.

JANELIA SINCLAIR LOUTIT



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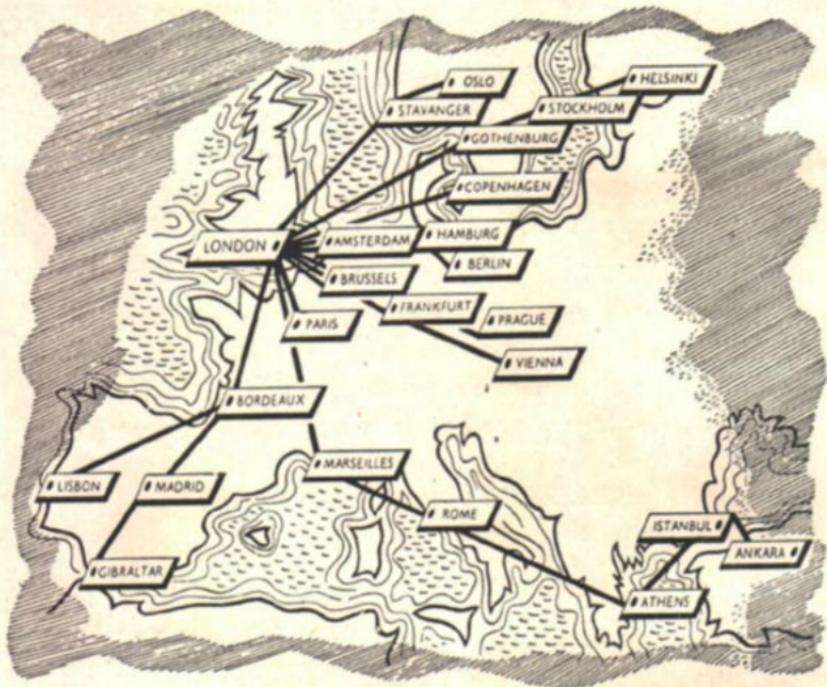
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Published by the Proprietors, HORIZON, 2 Lansdowne Terrace, London, W.C.1,  
and printed in England at The Curwen Press, Ltd., Plaistow, London, E.13

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